





A Fatal Misunderstanding

And Other Stories.
By W. Heimbürg.



Translated By Élise L. Lathrop
With Illustrations

NEW YORK:
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JOSEPH J. LITTLE, RECEIVER.



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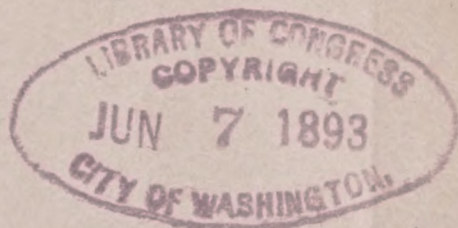
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A FATAL MISUNDERSTANDING.



“COUSIN ULRICH!

Cousin Ulrich!” called a fresh, girlish voice behind me, just as I was going out of the garden gate; and turning, I saw peeping over the green hedge, my cousin Frida’s blonde head.

Frida was really more to me than cousin. Her pretty little red lips, just a year before, in the beech arbor down in the garden, had given me her consent to be my wife, a fact which caused a storm in the forester’s pleasant house. For uncle scolded about foolish children, and would hear nothing of a student suitor, while my dear kind aunt officially took her husband’s side, but secretly she comforted us, and pictured to us in the most glowing colors the delights of such a short time of probation, which only lasted three hundred and sixty-five days.

For it was agreed that if after a year I still was of the same mind, and had by that time taken my degree of doctor of medicine as well as passed the governmental examination, I could again present myself at my uncle's. This was the stern man's ultimatum. "And," he added, taking from his lips the pipe, which he had smoked so vigorously that the blue clouds issued as regularly from it as from a steam-engine, "and, my boy, I now expect from you that you will not put all sorts of notions in Frida's head, with wasting paper on love-letters. After receiving one of such nonsensical epistles, no woman is responsible for her actions for a week : until she has answered it she loses her keys, lets the soup burn, and when she has finally posted her reply, she begins to look for the answer the very next day, runs to meet the postman, and cries her eyes red if the longed-for letter does not arrive just when she expects it. I wish no such doings ; let this be the end of it."

What could I do ? I promised that I would fulfil his request, and before I departed Frida and I once more exchanged vows of eternal fidelity in the arbor, and it seemed as though her great blue eyes would never cease shedding tears. I tried to console her, and took leave of her with as heavy a heart as a young student, head over ears in love as I was with my little blonde cousin, could have. I was a man of my word, however. I did not write to Frida, although I cannot deny that at first I daily prepared an epistle ; but, to my honor be it said, I destroyed it every time. Yet this one-sided correspondence, which never reached its destination, gave me some satisfaction, for I poured out all the feelings that made my heart seem full to overflowing. That, of course, I made use of all kinds of little permissible artifices, no one can blame me for. I wrote to my dear aunt and future mother-in-law a long birthday letter, for instance : up to this time I

had contented myself with sending her merely a birthday card. Now I wrote page after page, and asked all kinds of questions, and of Frida casually, for uncle read all his wife's letters. I received an answer to this letter, but unfortunately it was a "song without words," for aunt contented herself with sending me a fine box of sausages freshly made, together with her love. "No time to write," was added on the outside of the package.

The sausage proved to be as delicious as was to be expected from such an excellent housekeeper as my aunt, but yet this answer did not wholly satisfy me. In my need, I applied to my uncle for his advice in an affair in which I alone could know what was to be done. This time came a letter. "Boy, do not trouble me ! I know nothing about it ; ask your professor," was about the extent of the letter. And a last attempt to hear something of Frida through her brother had no better result, for the ten-year-old boy, to whom I wrote about a young puppy that I pretended to be very anxious to have, did indeed answer my letter, but his whole epistle was filled with expressions of regret that all the puppies were given away. I really would not have known what to do with the animal had I received it. But not a word of Frida.

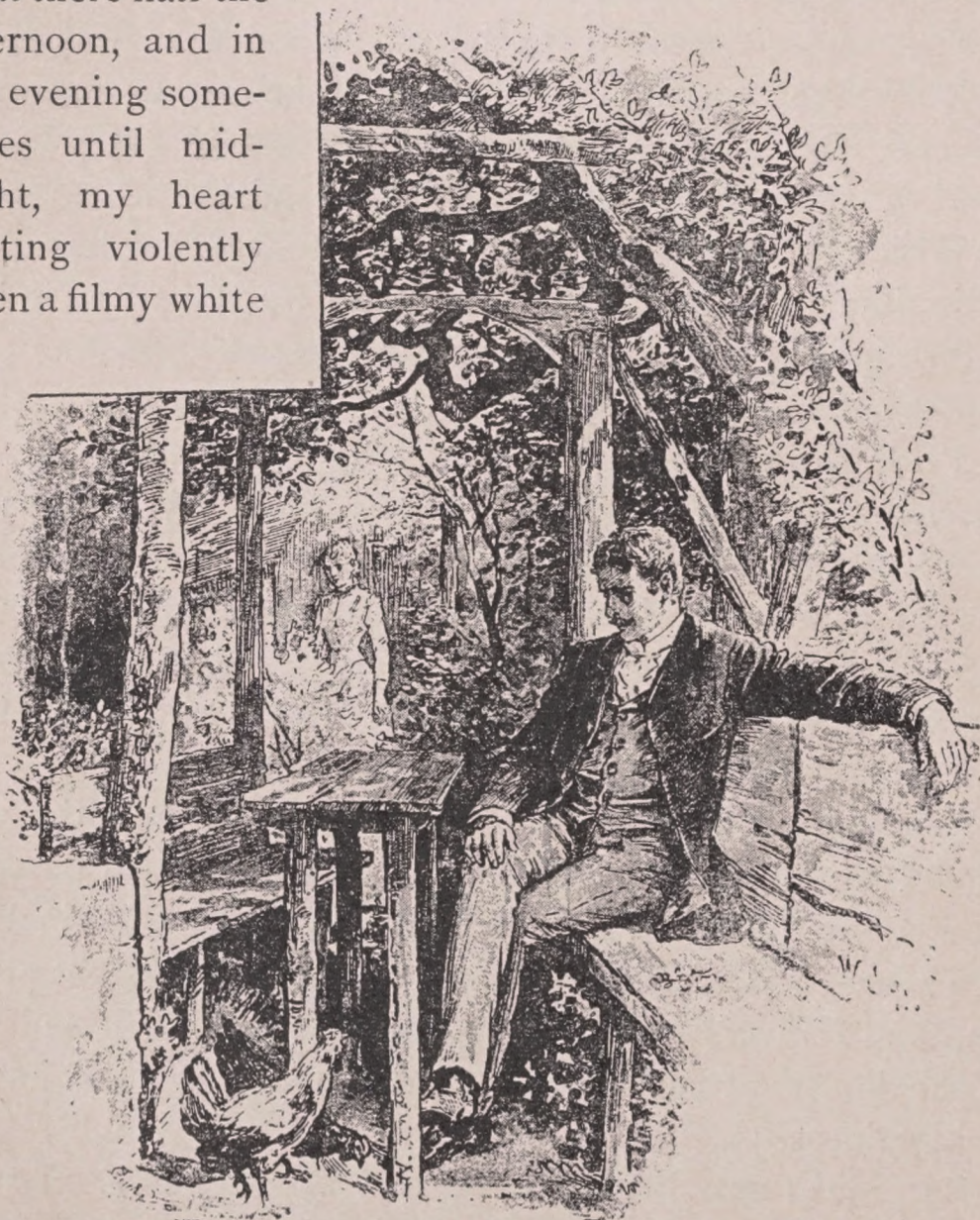
I submitted with a sigh to the inevitable, and the year passed more quickly than I could have believed possible. Now I was an M.D. I had passed all the examinations *cum laude*, had received the post of second assistant at the Imperial University Clinic, and returned with full sails set to the house of my uncle, to weigh anchor in the harbor of happiness.

But, alas ! my little cousin and secret *fiancée* met me with a gravity, a coldness, denied by her natural manners any more beautiful relation to me, and was so markedly my cousin, only my cousin, that there was nothing left for

me but to remain, with as much calmness as possible, although with secret vexation, her cousin and nothing more.

She was not unkind to me ; oh, no indeed ! No cousin in the world could have been more charming ; but she avoided everything that could recall the past in the most remote manner, and the arbor in the garden no longer seemed to exist for her ; but so much the more for me.

I sat there half the afternoon, and in the evening sometimes until midnight, my heart beating violently when a filmy white



gown shone through the bushes, and a bright voice trilled a song. It did not sound as though her heart were in it,

and it pained me when the dainty figure which I fancied would enter the arbor, turned away shortly, and vanished down one of the shady paths.

Uncle and aunt watched me anxiously ; for they could see plainly that I was cut to the heart by her manner. I did not show this to cousin Frida, and this concealment caused me all the more pain.

Up to this day the girl had avoided any *tête-à-tête* with me, so I was all the more surprised when I suddenly heard her call my name.

“ Are you going to the Red House ? If it is not disagreeable to you, cousin ”—she always laid special stress upon this horrible “ cousin ”—“ I will come with you. Father has just told me that old Wendenburg’s wife is ill, and mother has given me drops for her ; she has worked in our house for years, you know, so I must go down to see her, and I so dislike going through the woods alone.”

With these words she had come through the gateway, and now stood beside me in her light summer gown, which she had raised somewhat that its spotless whiteness might not come in contact with the damp forest-path. She wore a black lace scarf over her head, and her lovely face looked out doubly charming from the dark wrap. For the first time it occurred to me that she looked somewhat ill, and that her pretty red mouth wore a suffering expression which I had never seen a year before. I was startled, and, forgetting all else, was about to ask her if she felt ill. But her eyes gazed indifferently past me down the dark forest-path, and with childish delight she swung a little basket, so that my sympathetic words remained unspoken.

“ You flatter me greatly, my dear cousin,” I replied. “ I would indeed spare you the long walk, and, in my capacity of young physician eager for patients, relieve you of your visit to the sick-bed, but——”

She shrugged her delicate shoulders impatiently. "I, too, thought of this, and spoke of it to father," said she; "but the old woman is peculiar, and she hates doctors, young doctors especially; she would not take the drops from your hand, and father wishes me to go."

"So I am really sufficient protection against tramps, burglars, or whatever you seem to be afraid of? Indeed, this confidence——"

"Why not?" she interrupted me, and started to walk down the path. "You are a large, strong man, and my cousin besides."

I walked behind her, and—who will blame me?—was angry with the whims and caprices of girls in general, and my cousin in particular. I should have preferred to turn and go back, had not an uncontrollable curiosity drawn me to the "Red House."

So we wandered through the forest, she still ahead, softly trilling a song, as though she were the happiest girl in the world.

"Halt!" she cried suddenly. "We had almost passed it."

"What?" I asked.

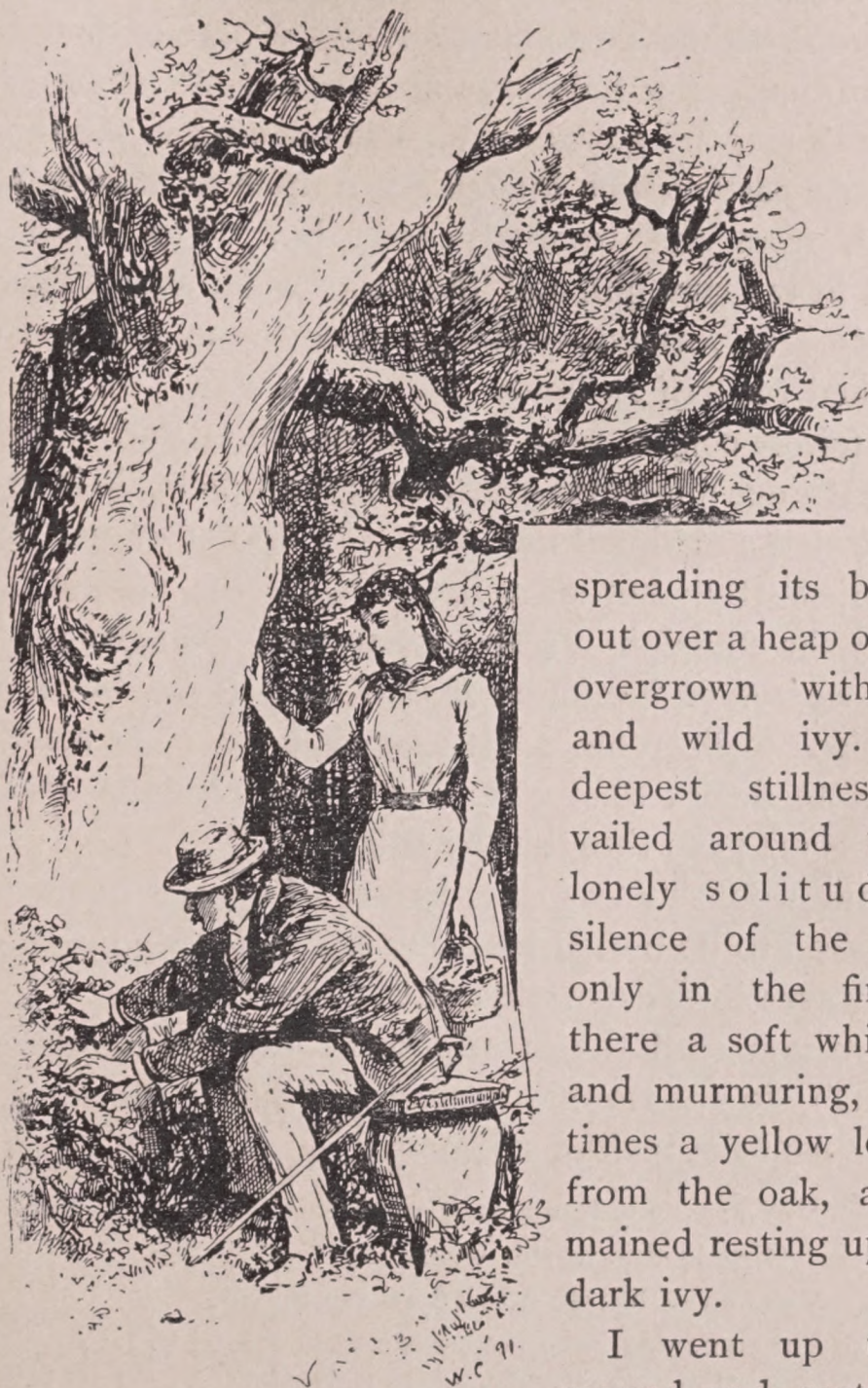
"The grave under the oak-tree."

"What grave, cousin?"

"Oh, pray do not ask. You have a whole pamphlet in your pocket which tells you the history of the person buried there. Father, who gave it to you, told me to bring you here before we went to the Red House: now come."

She held the branches of a pair of magnificent dark green firs apart, and pointed to a small path hardly to be distinguished. I had difficulty in following her, for the bushes closed behind her light form like violent waves, and struck me in the face as though to bar my passage.

Suddenly I found myself in a large opening surrounded by dark firs, while in the midst was a magnificent oak,



spreading its branches out over a heap of stones overgrown with moss and wild ivy. The deepest stillness prevailed around us—the lonely solitude and silence of the forest; only in the firs was there a soft whispering and murmuring, and at times a yellow leaf fell from the oak, and remained resting upon the dark ivy.

I went up to the mound and seated myself on a bench beside it, while I put aside the ivy to read the inscription upon an iron tablet. Was this where lay our ancestor, the strange old man who had been more

feared than loved by his family, and who had died alone and deserted, like a wounded lion in his den?

"Frida, who lies buried here?" I asked, for the once gilded letters had become black, and it was hard to decipher the inscription. But there was no answer; she stood with her back to me, and gazed through an opening in the forest at the ducal castle which looked down upon us, stately and dignified, from the wooded castle hill. The windows sparkled in the sunlight, and the white walls shone almost dazzlingly. It seemed within gunshot to me, and yet we had walked for half an hour.

"My fairest cousin, pray hear my question, and tell me, does the strange huntsman, our great-great-uncle, lie here?"

She turned and shook her head. "I do not know," said she then, shortly; her eyes rested upon the mound, and suddenly she added, in a softer, completely changed voice: "It is a matter of indifference who rests there, but it is a lovely place to sleep one's last sleep, is it not? It must be so sweet to dream where the trees whisper above us and the sunbeams peep through the branches."

"A true woodsman's grave, Frida. I cannot blame him if he wished to be buried here, instead of forming one of a row of graves in the churchyard."

"Have you read the inscription?" the girl interrupted me. "Oh, do not trouble yourself. I know the lines, by heart." And she recited solemnly:

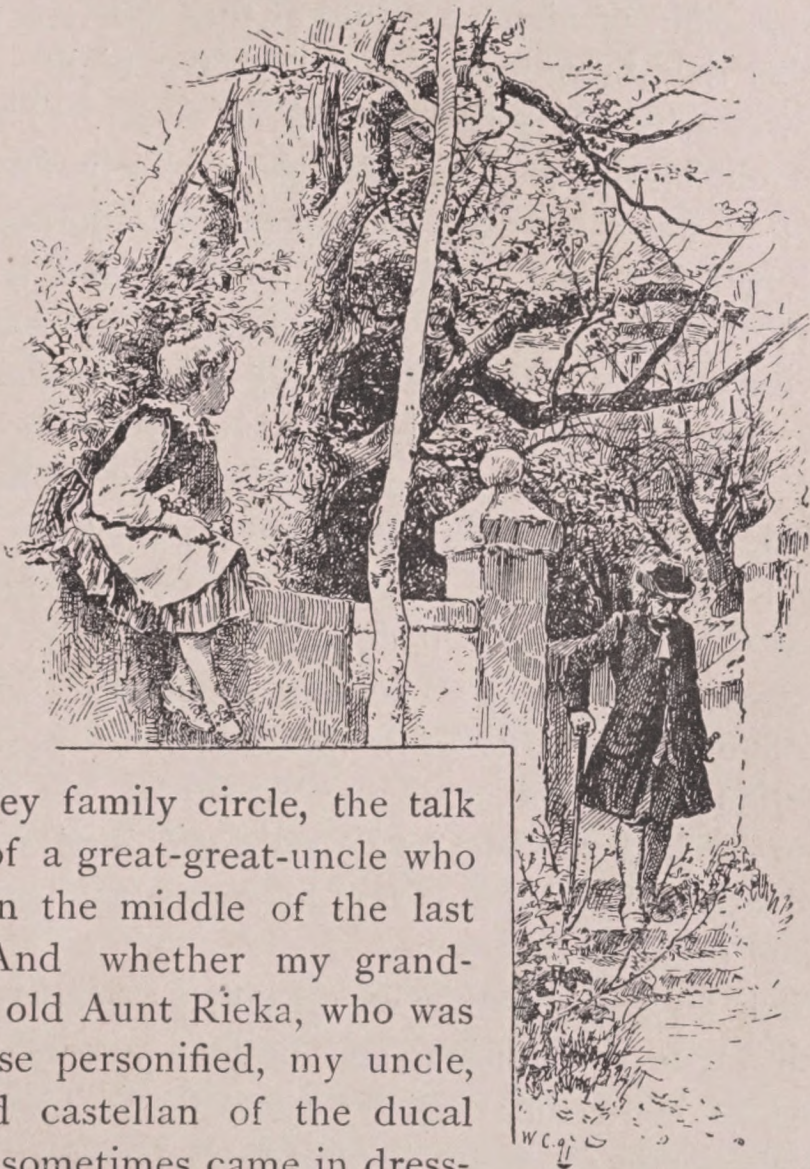
"We scarcely know each other
Here in this world, where ever
The sun of life doth briefly shine for all.
But some day, when our tears have ceased to fall,
Shall we meet, ne'er again to sever."

Then she hastily turned away.

"Very pretty, Frida; but it seems to me it is hardly an epitaph for a hunter."

"You are probably right," said she, and broke a few leaves from the ivy ; then she walked on before me down the dark forest-path.

When my mother visited my uncle, in his home in the Harz Mountains, with me on my vacations, in the evening,



in the cosey family circle, the talk was often of a great-great-uncle who had died in the middle of the last century. And whether my grandmother, or old Aunt Rieka, who was usually prose personified, my uncle, or the aged castellan of the ducal castle, who sometimes came in dressing-gown and slippers for a little chat, told of him, there was always a veil of true poetry, like a fragrant green wreath, about this figure, who appeared but vaguely in the frame of the narrative. For, of course, none of the living members of the family had known him, and only my very aged great-grandmother remembered having seen him

once, when he lived like a hermit in the Red House with an old factotum for servant, who was both cook and companion.

"I remember it as well as if it were to-day," she used to say. "I sat on the garden wall, eating grapes. I was perhaps eight or nine years old at that time ; it was a cold October day, there had been a frost the night before, and that was why the grapes tasted so sweet. Then a man came out of the castle garden gate, slowly and thoughtfully ; he was a strange-looking man, his clothes were old-fashioned but well kept, and his hair and beard silver white. I gazed at him in astonishment, and watched him drawing nearer. He walked along past our wall, and just as he reached the spot where I was leaning over curiously, he glanced up, and I do not remember how he looked, except that he had tears in his eyes, and there were tears hanging to his white beard ; so, involuntarily and very respectfully, I bade him 'good day.' Whether he returned my greeting I do not remember. But half an hour later the news flew through the little town that Prince Christian was dead, and the friend of his youth, from whom he had so long been estranged, had stood beside his death-bed and had closed his eyes after becoming reconciled to him."

Thus my grandmother would tell. And then there was much vague speculation, and useless putting together of heads, to learn the reason why two who had been such ardent friends in youth should have become so suddenly estranged. A woman's name was mentioned in connection, but no one knew anything definite, and but one thing was certain ; the subject had quarrelled with the prince, and often as the latter held out a hand of reconciliation it was repulsed with a coldness bordering on scorn, while the prince's patience and tolerance never came to an end ; but

when the head forester, grown old and gray, wished to retire from office, the Red House was given him for his own, and the head forester transferred to a new building nearer the town. And the hermit, who usually roughly and repel-
lently refused all kindnesses from the prince, this time made an exception, and thankfully accepted the privilege of ending his days there. After his death the house returned to the ownership of the prince, but, in accordance with a clause of his will, it remained unoccupied; the rooms were left as they had been during the owner's lifetime, and but seldom did the arched hall contain a gay band of hunters when the hunt was just in that neighborhood, and the time for lunch was too limited to allow of returning to the castle, a mile away.

And gradually interest in the man about whom, in his time, the whole country had shaken their heads, died away. The old people died, and the young ones were interested in different matters. Nor had I thought for a long time of the great-uncle long since buried in the green Harz forest.

But the evening before, my uncle had suddenly turned the conversation to this man, and, after talking for some time, had handed me a packet of yellowed papers, and had said to me in an almost solemn tone that I might read them in the place where these lines had once been written—in the Red House: it was the story of the dead man's life.

"I have not long had the manuscript in my possession," he had added; "it came into my hands by a strange chance. The pastor in Bergrode—but I will tell you that another time."

And there, at the end of the shady path, in the heart of the silent forest, rose the solitary house. It was squat and ugly, with its round, slated towers, and irregular rows of windows. A worn flight of sandstone steps led up to the lofty entrance door, and at each side a prime-

val, gnarled linden, with a stone bench beneath it. It might have been built for centuries, this solitary hunting box, and was a witness of the fondness for hunting of

long-past generations.

My cousin now walked quickly ahead of me under the tall beeches. The sunbeams falling between the leaves shed a golden light upon her lithe figure, and I paused and watched her ascend the moss-covered steps, the old house forming a charming background to her grace-

ful form. A magnificent pair of antlers were fastened above the high, iron-bound door, on one side of which was fastened a small owl, whose feathers had been torn and tumbled by

wind and storm. The windows, divided into numerous little panes, gazed sleepily and dimly out at the luxuriant foliage. Young beech and hazel saplings had grown close up to the old walls, and peeped curiously in at the windows, barring the sunbeams all entrance; there was a magical peace about this old hunter's box.

Frida had grown impatient. "Are you coming?" she cried, and let the iron knocker on the door fall upon the metal plate, so that the sound echoed loudly in the house.



A flock of daws issued from the tower, circled round it in alarm, and then flew up into the blue sky with loud calls, while from within came the hoarse bark of a dog, and then a joyous whine behind the door.

“Diana ! Diana !” cried the girl softly, “go and tell your master he has guests.”

Soon we heard a shuffling tread, a key was turned in the creaking lock, and a bent old man, with silvery hair and peculiarly sharp eyes, which at once proved him a hunter, opened the door.

“This is my Cousin Ulrich, Wendenburg ! He wishes to see the Red House,” began Frida, crossing the threshold. “Father asks you to unlock the old gentleman’s room for him. I come to see your wife ; I hope she is not seriously ill.”

“Thank you,” replied the old man crossly, without honoring me with a glance, although he opened the door somewhat wider to allow me to enter. We passed into a large hall, richly decorated with antlers. Over a high mantel hung the time-blackened oil portrait of a dissipated-looking man in mediæval hunting costume ; pictures of dogs’ heads and a prancing horse, with wildly floating mane, looked down from the wall on either side of him.

“Hackelmburg, the wild huntsman,” declared Frida casually, and signed for me to follow the old man, who was already ascending some creaking stairs. The dog raced after him as if mad, and sprang up on him as he now paused to unlock a low door in an arched niche of the thick walls. I stooped and followed Frida into the room.

“There, I have brought you here,” said she, “as I promised father. And now, Wendenburg, come to your wife. I have some drops for her ; it is the old story again, is it not ?”

The old man made no answer ; he brought forward a

couple of chairs, and drew his coat-sleeve over the inlaid top of the massive table.

"If the gentleman needs me I am in the back room," he murmured; "my wife is sleeping now, and I do not want to awaken her. I will call the young lady when she wakes." Then the door closed behind him, and we were alone.



At first Frida made a hasty movement, as though she would hurry after him; I saw her pale face flush crimson, then she came back, and seated herself in an arm-chair standing near the

stove. She closed her eyes, and every feature of her face seemed to say: "How tiresome and disagreeable, but I am not afraid of a *tête-à-tête* with you. No, indeed; it is a matter of perfect indifference to me."

Matters had turned out strangely, and now it was probably time for me to ask: "Frida, why are you so cold to me? What have I done to you? Do you no longer love me?" All this was on my lips; and yet I was silent, and turned away offended; she looked so ice cold, so unapproachable, and my conscience was clear. Besides, a friend had recently told me that it was well to train a woman *before* marriage, and if I spoke first now I would rue it all my life if she did finally become my wife.

My wife! I sighed deeply, and glanced once more at her, and she too was looking up from under her long lashes, but she closed her eyes, as though in terror, when our glances met. "Good! I will act as though I were alone here," I resolved.

We were in a moderate-sized, high-vaulted room;

through the deep-set windows the light fell but sparsely. A simple bed against a side wall, a writing-desk by one window, an arm-chair near the stove, a pipe stand, and a chess-table with chessmen, a clock in an old-fashioned carved box, the heavy oak table, and a few chairs, were the furniture of the apartment, severe and simple.

I shivered in the cold, damp room ; I opened a window, and let the warm autumn air stream in ; then I took a goblet from the ledge along the wall, and filled it with the wine with which aunt had thoughtfully filled my pocket flask. It was a beautiful glass, with hunting scenes carved upon it ; and an inscription : "To his friend, Henry Mardefeld. Prince Christian v. S. B."

Where were the hands which had once held this glass—the lips which had once touched it ? Dead ; dead, as the friend who had once given it. Does not everything in this world perish ?

I hesitated to drink ; it seemed to me as though in so doing I would touch the lips of a corpse ; then I gulped the contents down. And with the fiery wine an almost mystic mood came over me. Madame Poetry entered, drew a chair for me in front of the old writing-desk, and spread out the yellowed papers before me. I prepared to read, when there was a slight movement behind me, and I turned my head and looked in Frida's eyes. There was a silent petition in them, but the little mouth was closed defiantly ; yet I understood her, and asked quickly :

"Do you know the contents of these pages ?"

She silently shook her blonde head.

"Shall I read aloud ?"

She hesitated to reply, and I saw how she struggled with herself. Then she nodded, and it almost seemed to me that she accorded me the honor of being listened to most ungraciously. She nestled in the arm-chair again, and,

avoiding my eyes, gazed out at the trees. Her slender white figure stood out charmingly against the green twilight of the room ; the spicy odor of pine-trees came through the window, the shadows of the leaves tossing in the breeze fell upon the paper, while all around was solemn stillness—only the tick of a wood-worm at regular intervals, and

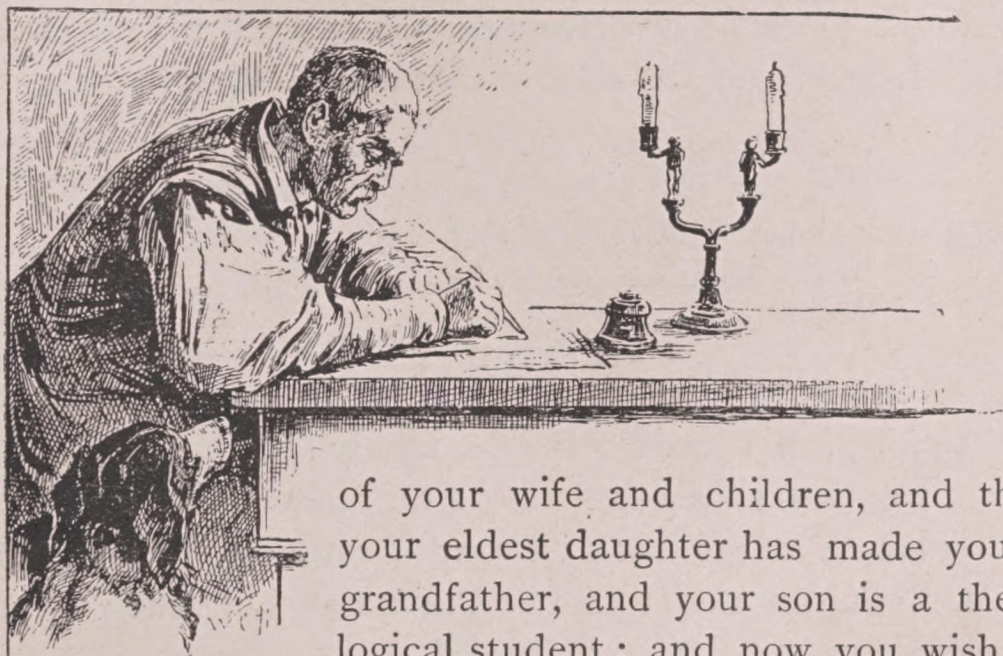


from the forest the occasional cry of a vulture. And now I lowered my eyes to the paper, and read as follows :

“ The Sunday after Ascension Day, Anno D., 1726.

“ Before me lies your letter, my darling John, and in every stroke of the pen I read the love and friendship

you cherish for your friend, although long years have passed since we saw each other's face. You also write



of your wife and children, and that your eldest daughter has made you a grandfather, and your son is a theological student; and now you wish to know how I am.

“Old friend, I could tell you in few words: I have never known how to be happy.

“But see, out there, my old James has a blonde-haired little girl visiting him; his grandchild, and she sits under the linden-tree in the sunlight and sings.

“You surely never believed, John, that I could be poetic. You have heard many a hunter's oath from my mouth, but no poesy; I do not believe that I could write it even, for my tongue is an awkward member. But deep in my heart strange melodies have rung; flowers have bloomed, and bells chimed, but no one can see or hear this. Ah, yes, if it had been different; if I, too, could have flattered and smiled, then——

“You ask about the death of Prince Christian—our Christel, as we used to call him. Yes, John, we were reconciled in his death hour—united by death. In life we were separated, John, for long, gloomy years, and what

separated us was a grave in which lay buried the happiness of our youth.

“The wild doves under the lindens still coo, may the devil take them. I was about to rise and tell them to take themselves off—when, what is that girl singing?

“A faint, sweet song of faith and love,
How fair, how pure was my dearest, my dove—
A song of love, of love only.
In the bright moonlight, by the stream,
Two blue eyes—it was a dream,
A dream, and I am left lonely!

“John, that is just it; lonely, lonely! No wife and no friend; and yet they say I have no feeling, that my heart is harder than the rock of our mountains. It is true, John, I could not complain and moan at that time; it was a misery too great to complain of.

“How did it happen?

“Oh, John, you remember the last time that we three—Prince Christel, you, and I—were together. You were already installed as priest over a fat parish, and your manners had already become somewhat ecclesiastical. I had not long worn the green forester’s coat of our duke’s service; our princely friend had indeed cared for us as a true friend, for we were young in years for such offices; he himself was about to start on his grand tour of foreign courts.

“You surely remember how he threw the glass from which we had drunk our parting toast into the water, and said, ‘No one’s lips shall touch it again’; and how we kissed each other, and evermore swore friendship, and that nothing in this world should separate us from each other.

“You must remember it, John. I, at least, fancy that I can still see his enthusiastic young face. Never later was I so convinced of what a noble, handsome young man he

was. How did you look in contrast, John? Like a well-fed donkey beside a thoroughbred horse. And I, spare me the comparison. Beauty was never my strong point. But enough of that. On that evening, for the last time, we clasped each other's hands in true friendship—it vanished, perished! Through the fault of whom? A woman!

“A woman! Search the history of the world, John, from Adam to the present day, the cause of evil is woman: and a woman's beauty is like poison, intoxicates the senses, and makes the heart ache. When friends are estranged, family happiness ruined, wedded pairs separated, war raging over the country—*cherchez la femme; où est la femme?* And, *voilà*, she can always be found, guilty or innocent—evil in the world is woman. And if it is true, as you firmly believe, that there is a devil who goes about the world seeking whom he may devour, he surely goes in the form of a beautiful woman. Calmly put aside all thoughts of horns and cloven hoofs, John!

“It was near Christmas when I saw her for the first time. A storm raged in the mountains, so that it seemed as though the wild hunt once more passed through the Harz forest. The wind whistled and howled around my old owl's nest, as though all the evil spirits sang a song of triumph. A rain mingled with sleet beat against the barred shutters of my room. I had just taken off my wet boots, for I had but just returned with gun and dogs; the devil knows, vexed enough, without having fired a shot.

“Then there was a knock, and since no one ever came to my lonely house in the evening, and least of all in such weather, I told the dogs to be silent, went out, and opened the door, which the storm immediately tore from my hold.

“There she stood on the threshold, John; had I but imagined *whom* I let in! A woman, so regal, slender, and

proud, and yet with her beautiful head bowed so humbly, while the storm pulled at her garments, and threw back the veil from the white face, and let me gaze into a pair of blue eyes—those eyes—John !

“ ‘Shelter,’ she murmured, ‘and



W.C. 9

help. The carriage lies broken near by on the road. The coachman has remained with the horses.' I opened



the door of my room, and told her to enter. She stooped under the low doorway, and as she stood near me, the blonde head reached only to my chin. I was always

awkward with women, yet her grave lips smiled when she saw how I tried to be polite.

“‘Thank you, monsieur!’ said she, and threw off her mantle; then she took her wet veil from her head, seated herself in the arm-chair by the fire, and petted my Cæsar: he laid his head confidingly on her knees, and she stroked him with her delicate little white hand. I stood absorbed in thought before her, and stared at her. It seemed strange to me to see a woman sitting there in my lonely room. Strange, and yet so sweet, I thought it; and I forgot everything in gazing at such a charming picture, until she begged me to send her coachman assistance.

“Then in alarm and confusion I hurried out, and told James to take good care of the stranger’s horses, and to give the coachman food and beer, while I told James’ wife to prepare a bed in one of the rooms of the upper story for the lady, as it proved that the carriage had been too severely damaged for her to continue her journey in such a storm.

“And thus it came about that I did not feel at home in my own room, so embarrassed and confused was I; but when I made a great effort and stood before her, she thanked me sweetly, and her lovely eyes gazed up at me until they fell before mine, and her lily-white face flushed. And so we sat together in silence, while the storm raged outside, and shook the branches of the old lindens.

“I am an awkward fellow. I could not talk. I only looked at her; and restrained the dog, who had not left her side, and now lay stretched at her feet. But she scarcely noticed it. She kept her eyes closed, and her white forehead wore a frown, as though her thoughts were painful. Then James’ wife came and brought food and wine, but she scarcely touched them, and then expressed a desire to rest.

“But I found no rest. I ran out in the storm and rain, and stared up at her bright window, and half the night I wandered about uneasily; and then I would speak to her, long speeches, in an undertone, so that the dogs stared at me in surprise.

“But the next day, the beautiful bird had flown with the dawn, before I rose, early as that was. On the table in her room I found an open note, in which, in dainty writing, were the words :

“‘Friederika von Babenberg thanks you for your hospitality, and hopes that she can repay you.’

“The note still lies in a drawer of my desk, with other trifles, curls, ribbons, and dried flowers, faded, and crumbling to dust.

“Now I knew that she was the daughter of old General Babenberg, of Mansdorf, scarce an hour’s ride distant, and from James I learned that she was returning from the burial of her brother, a wild fellow who had fallen in a duel. Now the large estate would fall, after the death of her old, almost childish father, to a distant branch of the family, and then she would have to leave Mansdorf. The coachman, who told this, had added that he should like to know what would become of her, for a poor baroness was not besieged by lovers.

“But from that time I had not a peaceful moment. Wherever I looked, the slender woman in the dark mourning garb stood before me; wherever I went, she walked beside me, and gazed at me with her blue eyes, and at night her pale face bent over my couch. Love had overtaken me, with all its magic power; I was twenty-four years old, John, and until then had never looked into the eyes of any woman. And it came about—the incredible, scarcely-to-be-hoped-for event occurred: Friederika von Babenberg became my betrothed.

“Oh, it all came about naturally ; no magic arts, no witchery, yet it seemed to me the loveliest wonder of the world, in the moment when I held her in my arms beside her sick father’s bed. ‘Friederika, all my life long I will thank you.’ I could say nothing more—everything else seemed small and pitiful in such a solemn hour. And she, too, must have felt that I would have given my life for her.

“So I thought.

“And now peace came over me again, for I knew that she was mine. And so I wandered in the forest day after day, still with the rapturous thought that it needed but a quarter of an hour’s walk for me to be able to look in her wonderful, mysterious eyes. And she sat at home, by her sick father’s bedside, and when I entered the dark chamber where the curtains were drawn, her eyes sparkled, and two delicate white hands were held out to me.

“Enough of this, old friend, enough : I have never had a gift for sentiment, as fashion then demanded ; it was not in me. Life in God’s free, open world of nature is not conducive to it. My thoughts came direct from my heart, like the shining white trunks of our native beeches, and as clear as bracing mountain air. I said what I wished, without hints or turns of speech. To be sure, the air here strikes many a one sharply in the face, but I did not notice that : I was accustomed to it ; it refreshed my head and heart.

“His old Excellency Babenberg died very shortly, and one week after his death I led Friederika home as my wife. Why should we delay ? The death of the old man was a release from nameless tortures, and Friederika longed for a home. She could no longer remain in her father’s house.

“In the castle chapel of Mansdorf the clergyman united us. A strange wedding indeed ! It was to be at twilight,

and the day seemed eternal to me. I took my gun and wandered through the woods, thinking that thus I would kill time better, and in pursuit of a wild cat which I had long been tracking, missed the appointed hour. I had but time to throw myself, just as I was, upon my horse's back, and so arrived at my bride's home after she had been waiting for me for some time.

"She was in the large drawing-room where a few days

before her father's coffin had stood. The black crape still hung from the gilded wainscoting, and I fancied that I could still perceive the odor of wax candles and dead flowers. Behind her I saw the



two unmarried sisters of her late father dressed in the robes of the cloister for ladies of high rank to which they be-

longed. They were stiff, cold, almost hostile to look upon were they, in their flowing robes. In truth, strange wedding guests !

“ But I noticed them but casually, for my eyes rested upon Friederika as though charmed ; she looked pale, paler than ever ; her slight figure was clad in a black gown, dark myrtle in her golden hair ; a more beautiful woman than she, has surely never man seen.

“ I forgot that I had come in rough hunting dress ; no word of excuse for my lateness came from my lips, although she raised her eyes questioningly and reproachfully to me. Hesitatingly at first, then with nervous haste, she held out her hand to me, and we walked rapidly to the chapel. Behind us the old canonesses whispered, I fancied about my dusty hunting clothes ; then she turned and looked at them reprovngly, and they were silent beneath her gaze.

“ But after the wedding, when we were to go home, it proved that I had also forgotten to order a carriage, and Friederika refused to go away in one which, until this time, had belonged to her house, but now, with everything else, was her cousin's property. ‘ Let us rather walk,’ said she harshly, her lips curling proudly. ‘ I have never begged.’

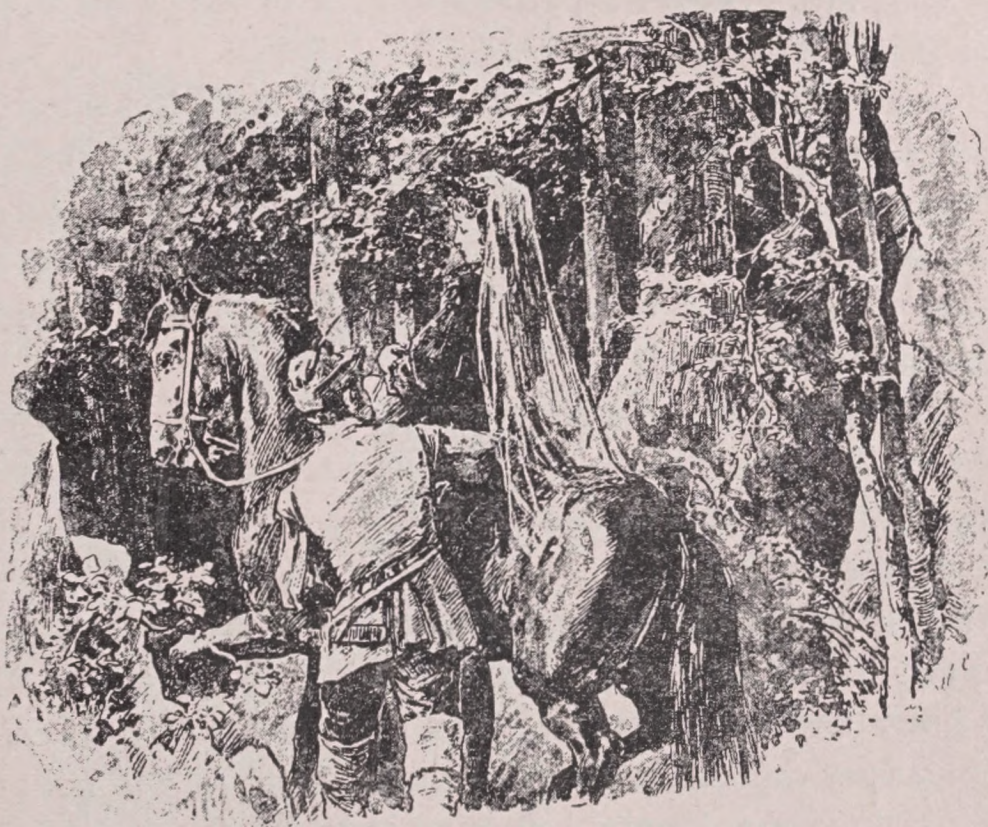
“ A painful quarter of an hour for me, especially as the two withered canonesses measured my young wife with scornful glances, each feature seeming to say : ‘ Oh, see, you proud, unyielding, defiant girl, what an awkward fool of a husband you have chosen, and you of noble birth ! Who will not hear, shall feel ; you go away with him like the wife of a day laborer ; did we not warn you to the best of our ability ?’

“ But Friederika stood in the porch ; she did not even glance at her father's old sisters : she stared timidly at the

house in which she was born and had lived until then, and waved her white hand as though in farewell.

“‘I am ready,’ said she then, the first word she had spoken to me this evening. But, when my horse was brought around, I asked: ‘Would you dare ride him, Friederika? I will hold the bridle tightly; no harm shall befall you.’

“Without a word of reply she swung herself into the



saddle. I laid my arm around her, and so I led my wife from her father's house.

“As we turned into the forest, the moon was already shining, and I led the horse out of the dark shadow of the trees into the white light that I might see her eyes. The August night was warm and sultry as though before a storm; my head and heart burned, and my eyes ached, but she did not once turn her proud head to me. So we proceeded in silence, until the quiet house lay before us,

bathed in silvery moonlight, but solitary, without greeting or decorations for its master's young wife. Not even a wreath was fastened over the door ; I had forgotten everything except herself.

"I came to the horse's side to lift her down, but she did not look at me, and turned the animal's head toward the stone bench under the linden ; there she dismounted, and her voice rang in my ears strangely cold and distinct.

" 'One word before it is too late ! I do not wish compassion, I would rather die——'

" 'Friederika,' I cried in terror, 'what are you saying ?' I thought that I had not understood her rightly.

" 'If merely compassion has brought me here—then—it is not yet too late. I have not yet crossed that threshold.'

"My heart cried out wildly, while the blood rushed angrily to my head.

" 'The devil ! what strange questions you ask !' I thundered at her, as a child screams loudest when he is frightened. 'Do you think I would throw away my liberty out of compassion ?'

"But scarcely had I said it when I lay at her feet, and weeping, buried my face in her gown.

"Then she bent over me and drew me to her breast. 'I am a poor orphan, and you'—she paused ; 'I will believe that you love me, Henry. It is so sweet to believe it,' she whispered then in a low, trembling voice. 'Forgive my foolish question ! See, if I could not have believed you I would have gone away this very night, and you would never have seen or found me again.'

" 'But I would have found you, Friederika,' I replied, and drew her roughly down upon the bench ; 'and had you flown up to yonder star I would have brought you back again.'

"She shook her head, and only then dropped the



horse's bridle, which she had been holding all this time.

"'No one returns from there, Henry,' said she, and for the first time she threw her arms fairly passionately around my neck, and her head rested on my breast.

"Above us the night wind whispered in the branches of the linden, the moonlight shone palely on the pointed roof of the house, and occasionally there was a distant flash of lightning. All around was silence—only the sleepy murmur of the spring near by, or the cry of a deer in the heart of the forest.

"Patience, John, the end comes—comes quicker than you suspect.

"She remained a grave and silent wife, as she had been a grave and

silent girl; there was nothing of the sweet fool'shness

of the honeymoon, and yet I was the happiest of men, John. I thought it was her grief for her brother and father that made her so grave and silent, and from day to day I hoped to see her lips smile—in vain. She treated me with a gentle mildness which fairly oppressed me, so that I would have fallen before her and kissed her hands, had it not seemed foolish and awkward to me. To this day I see her slight figure coming down the forest-path when, in the evening, she came to meet me as I returned from the forest. She seemed to float over the ground when she walked, so that I thought no blade of grass bent beneath her tread. She wore a black lace scarf loosely knotted over her blonde head, and usually held a bunch of wild-flowers in her hand, which she gathered as she walked, stooping here and there to pick them, Juno, my old spaniel, walking at her side. Later, she would sit beside me in our cosey room, patiently listening as I told her of the day's experiences.

“Thus four weeks passed ; then one day I came home, as usual, with the setting sun, and looked along the path for her in vain. I had shot a heron, and thought she would be pleased with the gray and white feathers. But she did not come to meet me that day, although it was a lovely September evening, and in fear that something might have befallen her I walked more rapidly

“As I drew nearer the house, and was about to ascend the steps, I heard a sound which made me pause and listen. It came from the group of young firs behind which was the falconry. My heart beat more rapidly : it was a sweet and silvery woman's laugh, and then lovely caressing words.

“I crossed the open place before the house, and turned around the group of firs ; there I saw my wife in the crimson light of the setting sun. She held one hand raised and stretched out, and my noble white falcon stood on

it, while with the right hand she offered him food, and again her silvery laugh rang out.

“‘Oh, you obstinate fellow! Take it, birdie, take it!’

“I did not know what charming miracle had changed my grave, proud wife into a lovely, laughing child. Her beautiful face was rosy. Was it from the sunset glow? But she was so strange and sweet that I paused to look at her, and fairly envied the defiant bird. Only as I passed close by him on my way to her, did I notice a man leaning against a peach-tree not far away.



“He was absorbed in the contemplation of the lovely woman, but now he turned his head, and in the next moment I held the friend of my youth in my arms, and a great happiness filled my heart.

“But he quickly freed himself from my arms, and pointing to Friederika, asked:

“‘Harry, Harry, who is that?’

“My eyes followed his, and I saw the slender, girlish figure slowly disappearing behind the firs. The bird sat solitary on his perch, his head resting on his breast.

“‘Who is that, Christel? Why, my wife, my darling young wife.’

“And I felt the blood rush to my face with proud joy.

“‘Harry my good Harry!’ cried Prince Christian, in

his old hearty manner, 'it is thus that I meet you again ! You could not endure living alone in the old house, and so you captured the most beautiful elf that ever flitted through the woods in the moonlight ! Slyboots, how did you go about winning the proudest and most beautiful of girls, Friederika von Babenberg ?'

" 'How did I go about it, Christel ?' I replied, gazing at the spot where my wife had stood. 'How did I go about it ?' I repeated, and glanced at him proudly ; 'I did not go about it at all ; our hearts went out to each other in love, and——'

" 'And she was willing to come to this solitude ?' Prince Christian interrupted me, glancing at the gray walls of the house, whose windows shone like glowing eyes in the rays of the setting sun.

" 'Yes, Christel, my wife loves me !'

" 'H'm,' said he, walking beside me to the house. 'So beautiful, so young, and so lovely, and do you believe that your falcon will long amuse her ?'

" 'She is not like other women,' I replied, roughly ; 'her grave nature is well adapted to solitude.' And so we walked silently to the house, and for a moment it seemed to me that the newly returned friend of my youth was less dear to me than formerly.

" But as we sat at supper, and looked into each other's eyes as of old, I took my goblet and touched it to his : 'Welcome home, Christian ! Avail yourself of the hospitalities of the Red House the same as of old ! You will always find the same reception here !'

" But my wife sat silently beside me ; her laugh had ceased. She looked more proud than ever, only a rosy flush had remained on her pale cheeks, and as our goblets touched, she raised her eyes and looked at me so that I forgot to drink ; I cannot tell you all that her eyes ex-

pressed—alarm, reproach, and entreaty. But as I opened my mouth to question her, she gently laid her hand on my shoulder, rose, and took leave of the prince, since ‘the gentlemen must have much to tell each other of all that had happened since their separation, and she had household duties to attend to.’

“‘Stay, Friederika,’ I pleaded ; ‘it may interest you to



hear of the doings in Paris, and what hats the court ladies wear.’

“‘Permit me to take my leave,’ she said, almost unpleasantly ; ‘what do I care about Paris and the fashions there?’ And, with a deep bow to the prince, she left the room.

“But I glanced at him triumphantly, and repeated :

“‘She is not like others, Christel.’

“I can see his face even to-day ; he stared at the door

behind which her slender figure had vanished, and his handsome face flushed crimson. I laughed loudly, and held out the goblet to him, and as he followed my example he turned as pale as the table-cloth.

“But then he began to tell of his travels, and praised Paris and its pretty women, and many a bold adventure was told to me. What morals, what looseness—I was sorry for the lips that told of this, but as I looked into his eyes I saw a good share of German honor, and thought, he may indeed have fallen in this rushing whirlpool, but he will never succumb; and I thought of his mother, the very pattern of a noble woman and princess, and that her pure spirit would keep him from all unworthy actions.

“When he wished to ride home, late into the night, he walked softly along the corridor, and in the vestibule, when I called loudly to the groom to bring lights, he restrained me violently :

“‘Do you not think that your wife is probably asleep?’

“I started. For an instant it dawned upon me what an awkward lout I was, but then I laughed.

“‘One sees that you have even improved upon Parisian politeness.’

“As he mounted his horse his eyes glanced up at the dark windows.

“‘May I come again, Harry?’ he now asked aloud.

“‘As often as you will, Christel; it is an honor and a pleasure to me, and if I am not at home you will find Friederika; only you must not talk to her of Paris,’ I added, laughingly, ‘for now you know what she thinks of it.’

“But I found Friederika in her room, still awake. She was reading a prayer book, and the lamplight formed a halo around her golden head.

“‘Friederika,’ I asked, ‘why did you leave us alone? Do you dislike Prince Christian?’

“‘No,’ said she, shortly; ‘he is your friend!’

“‘Will you not in future be more friendly to him?’ I asked, seating myself beside her. She bowed her head, but remained silent, her eyelids lowered.

“‘Do you like the white falcon, Friederika?’ I began. I wished to give her the bird which she liked; I longed for a smile, since I knew that she could smile.

“She raised her eyes in surprise. ‘I had one like it at home,’ said she softly. Then she quickly rose. ‘It is past midnight, and you go into the forest early.’

“My heart was on my tongue; I would so gladly have seized her small hand and said to her: ‘Why are you so cold, and why do your lips not once wear a smile when you are with me? And yet I know how charmingly you can smile and how your eyes can sparkle, how rosilily your cheeks can flush. Tell me what you wish: I will do everything, everything, only give me one kind glance.’ But I was silent; I did not know how to speak. Oh, that I had not been silent; perhaps all would yet have been well! But her laugh followed me, waking or sleeping, and I fancied I heard the sweet words, the silvery tones



of her voice : 'Take it, birdie ; take it, you obstinate fellow !'

"From that day I could not bear the bird.

"John, my pen almost refuses to write what comes now. I will bring it quickly to an end.

"Prince Christian came daily to the Red House—are you surprised? Not a day passed that we did not see each other. Sometimes I found them together coming to meet me in the sunset, or he sat in the house with her when it stormed, and watched her spin, but I never heard her laugh as she had on that evening. She was pale again, almost paler than before, and more silent, but a restlessness had come over her, and a crimson spot appeared on her cheek sometimes for a few seconds. Once, when I returned home quite late, when a bright moonlight night had kept me late on guard, and as I stole softly into my room so as not to disturb her slumber, she came into the room more hastily than was her wont, and as I bade her good evening, I saw that she had been weeping, and also that she tried to conceal it.

"Therefore I said nothing about it to her, and merely asked casually if Prince Christian had been here.

"Then her face changed, and flushed crimson. 'He has just ridden home,' she answered. 'I am surprised that you did not meet him on the way.'

"'I came from the Neindorfer woods,' said I.

"'I think you make your friend often wait in vain for you,' said she then, and her voice sounded wild, as though her heart beat violently.

"'Oh, he finds my dearest wife at home, to fill my place,' said I jokingly, and threw my arm around her ; 'or do you not think, Friederika, that such a substitute is welcome to him?' But her face remained pale ; she freed

herself from my arm, and left the room, and I could not understand her mysterious behavior.

“Several times I found her shut up in her room, and when I wondered at this and teased her, telling her that I supposed she was afraid of robbers, and asked whether I should get her a good gun for protection, she laughed, and said, with peculiar emphasis: ‘Of course, my foolish fear! What is there here worth the trouble of stealing?’

“I took this as a sign of a happy mood; how could I suspect the meaning concealed in these words? I, awkward fellow, who only understood plain language!

“And then—I can scarcely remember what happened that terrible day—I had to leave the house very early, for His Highness had invited some distinguished guests to a boar-hunt, and I must see that all preparations were made with double care to-day, since the noble ladies were to honor the hunt with their presence. During the hunt I did not miss Prince Christian, who formerly had never been absent, for I did everything mechanically, my thoughts with Friederika; for I had thought I heard her softly crying during the night, but was uncertain whether I had been awake or asleep. A wild boar was caught after he had killed several dogs, and was given to the foreign prince, and the hunting party soon after rode to a hunt breakfast at Castle Elchsburg.

“But suddenly a terror had come upon me, so that I took a short cut through the woods to arrive home the sooner. The branches struck me in the face, but I did not notice it; breathing quickly, at last I stood under the linden-tree, near the spring. A strange yellow light fell upon the old walls, and the trees in their autumnal garb, and as I saw the quiet, peaceful scene before me, peace, and almost a gay mood, came upon me. I crept softly through the gate,

climbed the ivy growing around her window, and peeped in to see what she was doing in the solitude.

“At first I saw nothing, for my eyes could not accustom themselves to the twilight within, but then—John! How I got down from the window and reached the stone bench where I found myself later, I do not know!

“My wife—and my friend! He was on his knees before her. She sat in a chair, her hands folded, her head bowed over them—not a breath, not a sound disturbed them in the lonely house. He who had the right to do so, was far away in the forest. A gloomy, evil mood came upon me; I tore the gun from its case on my shoulder, and laid it on the window ledge; but then I threw it far from me, and buried my face in my hands as I passed the darkest hours of my life.

“It was late when I went to my room, and listened for her steps. What I would do to her was not yet clear to me. Anger and scorn filled my heart, so that I could have spurned her with my foot like a dog. And at last I heard her coming; the door of the room slowly opened, and she stood on the threshold, so slender, so sweet! Her face was pale and tear-stained as she came, and, pausing before me, sank to the floor. ‘Henry! Henry!’ rang in my ears,



and she raised her clasped hands to me. What else she said I did not understand—the words died on her lips.

“I sprang up in wild rage, and tore her from the floor. I seized her hand firmly, and led her out of the room, through the hall, across the threshold of my house. She



followed me unresistingly, only her eyes gave me one look like that of a mortally wounded dove.

“I said nothing, merely pointed down the road with one hand; but she understood me. She drew herself up proudly, threw back her beautiful head, and thus she stood

before me as though not she, but I, were guilty. Her lips moved as though she would speak, then she turned away with a fairly scornful gesture, and walked away in the twilight—and as she disappeared from my sight, I threw my gun over my shoulder, and in wild grief spent the night roving through the forest.

“When I came home in the misty dawn, I had but one



wish, that she might have returned, guilty or not ; I was too deeply in the power of the wretched woman. James told me in alarm that his mistress had not been home all night, so that I cried, with a bitter laugh : ‘She probably

found shelter somewhere.' But at that very moment a rider came galloping up, and by the black horse I recognized Prince Christian. I handed my gun to James, that no accident might happen, rested my hands at my sides, and gloomily watched him come on.

"He held out his hand to me, his hair hung in disorder over his brow, his clothes were unkempt, and he looked pale and worn as one who has passed the night in great suffering.

"'I have something to say to you, Harry,' said he dully, jumping from his horse.

"'What is to be said between us can be spoken only by an iron mouth,' I replied. He started, and gazed at me piercingly.

"'I think you misunderstand me, Harry. I wish to speak for your wife——'

"Then I laughed shrilly. 'My wife! I did not know that I still had one, but I have not yet forgotten that I *once* had one.'

"'For God's sake, Henry!' he cried in horror, 'what does this mean? How you look! Where is Friederika?'

"'You probably know that better than I,' I replied.

"But he had grown deathly pale.

"'She has gone—you have—' Then he broke off. 'Harry, you are a rough, unfeeling mortal!' he cried. 'You are not worthy of one glance from her! You never loved her!'

"Then I laughed again. 'You may know better,' I replied; 'I am no courtier and no prince, and have never learned in Paris how to seduce the wife of a friend!'

"But he scarcely noticed my bitter words, and behaved like a desperate man, and madly ordered grooms and foresters to search for the woman, while James's wife ran

about repeating the same thing: the mistress had done herself harm, she had long been so strange and peculiar, and at times had screamed and cried so.

“‘Master,’ the woman cried, falling down on the front steps before me, where I still stood as though turned to stone, ‘master, I will never survive this; she has jumped into the lake—into the lake!’

“But the words which Friederika had spoken on her wedding night rang in my ears:

“‘Then I would have gone away, and you would never have found me again.’

“Why did she wish to go away then? Because she fancied that I did not love her, and yet this love was nothing to her. She had proved faithless at the first temptation she encountered.

“Suddenly a wild despair overpowered me. God, if it were true! If she lay in the lake, pale and dead!

“I rushed down the steps; I wished to look for her, but—what was she to me? Another sought her, with all the terror of a lover. She herself had deprived me of the right to look for her.

“I went to my room and began to pace up and down; occasionally my eyes fell upon the gun, and I debated whether it would not be better to make an end of my miserable life. ‘For the sake of a woman, a faithless woman?’ I asked myself then. ‘Is not life worth more than such a price?’

“I opened the door of her room; everything was just as she had left it—on the table by the window were books which Prince Christian had brought her, a lace scarf which she so liked to wear over her hair, and in a crystal vase a bunch of red mountain-ash berries and gay-colored oak leaves. The little spinning wheel with the ivory ornamentation was pushed aside. I fancied I could see

the white hand holding the fine thread, the small foot resting on the treadle.

“ ‘Friederika, Friederika,’ I cried aloud, ‘it cannot be ; it is only a dream, a terrible dream ; you must come back again ; all must be as it was—no, better, far happier ; what have I done to you that you should make me so miserable ?’

“ But all was silence, a silence as of death, and I lay before her chair hour after hour, and held the scarf pressed against my burning cheeks until darkness fell ; only the tick of the clock warned me that time never stands still.

“ Then a confusion of voices, cries of grief from James’s wife, and as I rushed out of the room I saw, in the flickering light of a torch—my wife ! Prince Christian carried her in his arms, and just at that moment laid her on a settee ; and there she lay, strangely pale and rigid, and from the long blonde hair and her garments fell bright drops of water, and a long wet trail was visible down the hall.

“ My heart stood still ; I had to lean against the wall, while the men who filled the hall had grown quiet. I was about to go to her, but Prince Christian barred my path, and raised his hand repellently. ‘What more do you wish with her ?’

“ Then I turned away, and went back to my room, John, and with the dawn I had become another man. They said I had a heart of stone ; they did not know how soft it had been.

“ I did not ask where they would bury her—what did it concern me ? I was treated as though I were a stranger in this house ; the old aunts came from the cloister, but they did not ask for me ; I was a heartless man, more unfeeling than stone ; I had let her perish at my side—I had driven her to her death.

“ The night before the burial, I crept into the room

where they had laid her in her coffin. The moon shone brightly through the window, and showed me the face which I had loved better than my life and which was now rigid in the terrible, cold slumber of death. I longed to clasp the delicate white hands, which were folded over her quiet bosom, but an uncontrollable terror overcame me: those hands had been faithless, like the lovely woman herself—her love a lie and deception, a lie and deception friendship, the whole world lies and deceit.

“A half-suppressed curse passed my lips, and with heavy steps I left the chamber of death; the hall door closed with a bang which echoed through the quiet house. Then I whistled to my dogs, threw the gun over my shoulder, and wandered restlessly about in the night. How often since then have I wandered through the long night, in the sweet moonlight of summer, in the storms of autumn, always the pale woman’s face before my eyes.



“But the morning they buried her was so stormy that the men who carried the coffin could scarcely stand, and the trees, almost stripped of their leaves, groaned and sighed in the wind. The first

few flakes of snow of the approaching winter whirled in the air, and rested on the dark green of the fir-trees like the white flowers with which James's wife had adorned the coffin. I had pressed my forehead against the panes of the window, and gazed after the little procession as it proceeded in the storm, but my heart felt nothing, and could no longer cry out in pain ; it was dead, John, as cold and dead as the one in the coffin. The dog beside me whined ; the dumb animal realized what he had lost, and from the hall came the cries and moans of the women.

“Then I roused myself as the last man of the procession disappeared behind the trees, ordered my horse saddled and rode to the castle ; but when I demanded to speak with Prince Christian, I was told that he had left early that morning, no one knew for where ; a letter which His Highness had left for me had just been sent to me. Then I turned, and smiled mockingly : ‘That is right,’ I said to myself ; ‘faithless and cowardly, and of princely blood !’

“But the people whom I met avoided me, and gazed at me in horror, while I heard a young girl say :

“‘See what man's fidelity amounts to. His wife has been buried perhaps fifteen minutes, and he rides along as though nothing had happened. Mother, I will never have a husband.’

“‘God keep you from such a wretch !’ said the mother.

“But when I arrived at home I opened the letter. ‘It is best that everything should for the present remain unsaid between us,’ it ran. ‘For you could not bear to hear the truth now. I go because I do not wish to fight with you. Even now, still your sincere friend, ——.’

“To believe that would have been more than could have been expected of me then.

“Only after years did chance lead me to Friederika's

grave. It was on the anniversary of the day when first I had brought her home. I wandered about more desperate than ever. I was a desolate, gloomy man, whom his kind avoided. Malicious tongues had told who knows what tales of me, representing me as a monster, a brute. I had thrown myself under a primeval oak, the peaceful stillness and solitude of the woods was around me, only the leaves rustled softly above me, and the mound of stones was simple and unadorned. Opposite the grave a clearing had been made, and in the green frame of the branches could be seen in the distance the ducal castle, while the windows shone and sparkled as though greeting the solitary grave, as though they jealously watched over her peaceful slumber.

“‘Even in death!’ I murmured, and turned away with a bitter smile.

“Prince Christian returned home only after years, when I, though physically still young, was mentally an old man. Such a grief preys upon one, John; it makes one old before his time.

“The prince tried to speak with me; I repulsed him, or my heart, in its rage and grief, would have made me treat him with less respect than I owed the brother of my sovereign, the duke. He was nothing more to me. Yet he repeated his attempt, not once but a hundred times; still I avoided him.

“And after years a violent fever attacked him, and when they told me he was dying and asked me to come, I went and stood beside his bed, not in love and forgiveness—no, as a judge.

“And then he told me that he had secretly loved her before I ever knew her, but that she had never known it; then he saw her again as my wife, and discovered that she was not happy, and his passion increased so that he saw

nothing but her and her sad face. And one day when he found her in tears, he had told her of his love, being no longer able to control himself.

“‘You know, Henry, what day I mean,’ he added, and his colorless face grew even paler. ‘But she repulsed me harshly ; she loved but one person, she said—you, Harry,



you, Harry !’ He raised himself from his pillows, and grasped my hands. ‘You alone, Harry !’ he repeated, gasping for breath ; ‘her grief, her unhappiness was—she thought you did not love her. Poor Harry, you never understood each other—misunderstood ! That is hard !’

“Then he sank back wearily among his pillows, and after a while he whispered again :

“‘Forgive me, Harry, for the sake of her memory. She loved you, and you alone!’

“I sat by him, and held his cold hands, until his weary eyes closed in the last sleep. But from his death-bed I hurried to her grave—John, do you know what remorse is? May God grant that you never have to know it!

“It is late, twilight is gathering, the song has long since



ceased outside. The wind blows in cold through the open window, and I am old.

“Love, hate, and misery are one—one, John!

“If you ever come to our mountains, do not come to see me; if I am still alive, keep my youthful image in your memory. It is better so. But do not fail to see her grave; you know, in the pine forest under the oak! And when you read the words on the stone, think of her and of me,—of me, John, who never understood how to be happy!

“Written in the Red House.

“Your friend,

“HENRY MARDEFELD.”

My voice died away, and the room was filled with the red light of the setting sun, still rosy, as it had been a long, long time ago, when the solitary, unhappy man wrote those lines. A golden light lay on the tops of the old lindens, and tinged rosily the bare walls of the little room, while it fell like a bright veil over the white girlish figure in my arms.

"Friederika," I said softly, and kissed the wet eyes.

Which of us took the first step? I do not know.

"It was my fault," said she at last, after a long silence.

"I was angry and defiant."

"No, no—I. I should have spoken to you frankly," I replied.

"Oh, I thought you no longer loved me, because you did not once write."

"But I could not, darling. I had promised your father——"

"Oh, Ulrich, how unhappy I was!"

"And I too, Frida!"

And as I now gazed into her tearful blue eyes, I read a sweet promise in them: "Never, never will I be proud to you again." And in my heart I, too, made her a promise, and we have both kept it, this silent promise, up to this hour. And it was five years ago that the myrtle wreath rested upon my wife's brow.

On the way home we passed the solitary grave once more, and Frida laid a wreath of evergreen on the ivy-grown mound. Hand in hand we sat there on the little bench, and above us whispered and rustled the leaves in the evening breeze, and murmured strangely to our ears of joy and sorrow, now mourning, now repining: the breeze told us of those who slumbered here, and whose history it knew well—of the lovely, unhappy woman, of the honest man who loved her better than everything, of the wondrous

treasure of the sweetest happiness in life which lay buried beneath these stones, because neither of these two had known how to find it.

Uncle met us at the gate ; the moon was rising over the mountains.

“ Well,” he asked, “ did you read the history ? ”



“ Yes, father,” said I. And he nodded, smiled genially, pressed our hands, and kissed his little daughter on the forehead.

Now I knew why he had given me those papers—those yellowed old papers.



II.

UNITED IN DEATH.

YES, such an old book can tell tales. One can read destinies between its lines. I am very fond of it, and am proud that I received it as a souvenir, while a whole troop of grandchildren laid claim to it.

It begins with a trembling old man's handwriting. On the fourth of January, 1805, the withered right hand of an eighty-year-old man copied down the words of the well-known poem :

“Always be faithful and honest,” etc.

for the young owner of the book, then leaving his father's house to go out into the world and seek his fortune. Underneath is written :

“When you read these verses let your most earnest endeavor be to live up to them ; by this you will rejoice your father's heart as he wishes.

CHRISTIAN HEINRICH V. S.”

The book closes on the last page with these lines, possibly quite new at the time :

“Who is more fond of you than I

Who sign myself

Always your friend,

HERMANN POSSECK?”

And what can be read in the intervening pages, between these exaggerated assurances of friendship, these paternal

admonitions, these motherly, loving words, and fond wishes of aunts and uncles?

Women's delicate hands have interwoven roses and violets with their verses, and speak of parting and meeting.

"May roses bloom along the path of thy life, dear Stetten,
But do not let their luxuriant beauty overshadow the forget-me-not.
"LOUISE MEYER."

Louise Meyer! How long the tears may have trembled on your lashes before they fell on the coarse paper where they made the spot still to be seen beside your name!

And how touching are these lines in another place:

"When thou art bound by magic bands,
Then, ah, then think of Marie.
When flowers are given by fairer hands,
Think of one left to mourn thee."

Really, one would think that grandfather had been a true heart-breaker, did not one know how exaggerated were expressions in those days.

Amidst all these effusions of love and friendship, one page, divided by a faint pencil stroke, seems strangely out of place. A man and a woman have both written upon it.

He, as follows:

"May you, my dear young friend, always be as happy as he who writes these words now feels. Yours,

"ROBERT OSSWALD.

"The evening before his wedding, *October 31, 1810.*"

On the other side of the page stands:

"The soul in our body is as if in a prison—it is a slave. It is a thought full of consolation that the prison walls will one day be battered down, the chains of slavery be broken. How delightful this liberty will be—but when?

"Remember your sincere friend,

"MINNA BRINKMANN."

But after the girl's name grandfather's hand had drawn a cross : “ + d. November 1, 1810.”

When I saw the page for the first time I asked with frightened look—at that time the owner of the book was still alive :

“ Grandfather, is that possible ? Did this Minna Brinkmann write these lines so shortly before her death ? ”

The old man nodded. “ The first hour of her wedding-day was her death hour.”

“ But that is terrible ! ”

“ Yes, that it was,” said grandfather, and his pleasant face suddenly grew grave. “ And does it not seem as though she suspected her fate when one sees the words she wrote ? ”

“ Ah, grandfather, please tell me of it,” I pleaded. “ It is a strange sentence for a bride. There is such deep longing for death in those words, ‘ but when ? ’ And she wrote that shortly before her wedding. Was she not happy ? ”

“ He is still alive, old Robert Osswald,” he replied evasively.

“ Where, grandfather ? ”

“ On his estate. A strange fellow. He has never married.”

“ Oh, grandfather, please tell me all about it.”

“ Yes, child, willingly ; all that I know ; but it is not a cheerful story : ”—

I came to the Friedrichscastle forestry when a young forester. It was on an August evening, toward the end of the month, when I saw the gloomy nest for the first time. It lay there as if deserted behind the tall oaks, so solitary, surrounded by dense forests. It was a hunting-box of the Duke of B. The head forester lived on the ground floor. Upstairs were the ducal apartments and banquet

hall. Broad stone steps led up to a massive door. Two statues of hunters blowing horns stood one on each side, and the lantern fastened over the door shed a faint light upon them, so that it seemed as though the fellows were alive, and as though the stag's head with its sixteen antlers over the portal made all sorts of strange grimaces.

I stood there watching the play of the light, when I



heard light steps in the hall, and immediately after a white figure appeared on the threshold, and for the first time I saw Minna Brinkmann.

She did not at once see me, for she gazed up at the sky, covered this evening with dark thunder clouds, and so, like a bold young forester, I could stare at her for some moments.

I do not know whether she was really beautiful. She was not extremely young—I thought her perhaps twenty-eight—but this girl had a charm which it would be vain for me to attempt to describe, but which every one who came near her felt.

She reminded me of those dainty, bright-eyed creatures hidden beneath the veil of an Oriental woman. At least I fancied that the Sultan's favorite wife might look like this girl, and whenever I saw her I thought she should have wandered among palms, over gay-colored sands, instead of under the gnarled oaks of a German forest. She was graceful as a deer, and had a pair of eyes which I can tell you, girl, were enough to make a young man dizzy when she turned them upon him. However, she was not very lavish with her looks, and she carried her beautiful little head very haughtily. The neighbors called her the Princess. I did not know it at the time, but thought that no princess could look more fine and proud than she.

When she perceived me she bowed slightly, and told me that her uncle and aunt expected me, and that my room was ready. She walked, or rather floated, down the hall to call a maid to show me the way, for I had expressed the wish first to go to my room to dress for my introduction to my new superior, as the long post journey in the glowing heat had not improved my looks.

After this introduction had taken place, and I had talked for an hour with the pleasant head forester Brinkmann, and his kind but somewhat tiresome wife, I was dismissed, for the old man went to bed with the chickens; but I slipped out of the door, and wandered up and down before the house in the gloomy, sultry night, my path lighted only by the regular flashes of lightning of a distant thunder storm.

The old couple had told me that they had a niece living in the house; this niece I knew was out-doors, and it is

very possible that she was the cause of my continued walking, for during the old people's talk her bright face had not once left my thoughts.

My wish to see something of her was really fulfilled. The house which I walked around lay in a clearing in the midst of the forest. At the back was a garden, where Mrs. Brinkmann, who, I had discovered, was a great lover of flowers, raised quantities of the most beautiful pinks and verbenas. The crowning glory of this little garden was an arbor of beeches, artfully bound together and kept carefully trimmed. That evening I could, of course, distinguish plainly neither flowers nor arbor. I inhaled the fragrance of the former; it was fairly intoxicating—heliotrope, pinks, and mignonette. But by the flashes of lightning this arbor seemed a cave to me, and in this dark hiding-place gleamed the white gown of Minna Brinkmann.

I placed myself in the shadow of the old oaks on the other side of the garden, and stared over at the arbor as anxiously as though I were on guard. The lightning did its duty: every few seconds I saw the white gown. The thick-walled stone castle lay dark and massive before me; only two windows of the upper story were dimly lighted.

Several times a shadow crossed the curtains; then the light was extinguished, and now all seemed to sleep and rest.

I did not stir; the air, the stillness did me good, and I was curious to learn how long Miss Minna would dream there. I was only sorry that, since I was a complete stranger, I could not ask leave to sit opposite her in the arbor, and I pictured to myself that perhaps I might have this happiness some day, if I followed my mother's directions very delicately and carefully; and that possibly the lovely girl would later permit me to bring my zither, which

at that time I played with enthusiasm, and that probably it would not be as tiresome here as I had at first imagined.

From these charming dreams of the future a quick, light, though strong tread aroused me. By the lightning I saw a man drawing near; he passed close to me, and in the next moment I heard Minna's voice :

"Your Highness !—Max !" There was a strange charm in the girl's voice ; it was somewhat veiled and soft and tender, but it was never so sweet and trembling as at this moment.

For a while I stood as if rooted to the ground. Highness? Max? That could only be Prince Max—Prince Max, the second son of the ducal house, whom all the world considered eccentric, since he withdrew from court festivities and buried himself in the forest, more to live for his books than for the noble pursuit of hunting. And this Prince Max was here, and now, this sultry summer night, sat in the arbor with a beautiful girl, whom he even kissed—kissed—I heard it very plainly, and also a deep, vibrating voice saying : "You are better than I ; you are stronger. I do not know, Minna, how I can bear it——"

"You will, Max ; you must," she replied.

And now the flashes of lightning showed me plainly the prince at the girl's feet, his face buried despairingly in the folds of her gown.

I turned to go ; my heart beat loudly, and I was touched. So this was the secret which made the prince, beloved by the whole land, so melancholy.

Their voices rang after me. "Do not weep—ah, pray, do not weep. I cannot see you shed tears ; it is all in vain——" said she ; and it sounded despairing and mournful as when one's hopes are at an end.

Softly I crept away in the dark shadow, and as softly entered the house and went to my little gable room.

In the hall of the second story burned an old-fashioned hanging lamp, in the light of which I saw a servant in the dark green livery of the ducal house ; he had one arm round the neck of the pretty chambermaid, and I heard him say laughingly : “ Will you be true to me, Luischen ? ”

And she replied : “ Thanks, no ; you will never come back again.”

“ Who says so ? ” he asked.

“ Miss Minna,” said she. “ I think your prince is to be married.”

The good-looking fellow laughed. “ He, Luischen ? Do not let them make you believe that. They would all like to have him put his head through the yoke, because our crown prince is such a sickly, consumptive creature, who will hardly marry. Good gracious, he is on his last legs. But my prince does not think of it ; I should know of it, Luischen. We had not been in the capital three days ; we scarcely showed ourselves in the theatre once, or paid our respects to the lady mother, when we could bear the air there no longer, and came here.”

In their joking the two did not see me cross the hall and begin to ascend the last flight of stairs.

At that time I was still very young, and the whole charm of the summer night and the romantic scene outdoors filled my heart. I could not sleep, although I had an almost endless, wearisome post journey behind me. I thought continually of the prince, the beautiful girl, and those hopeless words, “ Do not weep ; it is all in vain ! ”

The spell finally yielded to a very prosaic, sound, youthful slumber, and an extremely uninteresting awakening.

It had rained during the night, and the head forester and I went in the gray August morning to the forest, because on these windless, sultry days the deer come out in numbers.

Unfortunately, as we left the house we met a very old, toothless woman with a basket on her back. At sight of her the forester's face flushed with rage, and he greeted her with a "Go to the devil!" In fact, we had no luck.

It began to rain again, and we came home dripping wet and without booty, the old man also grumbling angrily, for I had been so unfortunate as to spoil his chance of a shot at a deer. He said I had stared at the beautiful creature too much, fairly stood still to gaze at it ; in short, I received a severe scolding.

The old house seemed to me by daylight uncannily gloomy. A question as to whether the upper rooms were occupied was answered by a short "No !" I saw neither the mistress of the house nor her niece at the silent breakfast. The two ladies did not appear until dinner-time. Miss Minna was white as the tablecloth ; she displayed a calmness which I thought entirely forced. She scarcely ate, gave her uncle an occasional shy, questioning glance, and when he gazed at her vexedly she turned her head and gazed out of the window, against which the raindrops beat. Mrs. Brinkmann had been crying.

When the soup was removed from the table, the old coachman came to the door and asked if there were any letters for him to take ; he was going to the town and would stop at the post-office.

For a moment there was silence. Mrs. Brinkmann had



even shaken her head in dismissal, when Minna stretched out her hand—she was now not only pale, her face was almost livid. She tried to speak, but with her left hand she clutched her throat ; then she fumbled in the folds of her gown and held out a letter in her trembling hand to the man. “To Mr. Osswald,” came brokenly from her lips.

“To Niebelintz ?” asked the old man, scratching his ear.

She nodded, her face rigid.

“It is out of my way,” grumbled the man.

“Confound you !” burst out Mr. Brinkmann. “Get out of the house. You could have been half-way there by this time.”

And then the old forester sprang up, threw his crumpled napkin on the table, and ran into the adjoining room, where I heard him coughing and blowing his nose, and when he came back again his eyes were filled with tears. He went behind the chair on which Minna sat with folded hands and wholly expressionless face, and suddenly he took her delicate head, adorned with a wealth of the most beautiful chestnut hair, between his two hands. “Minna,” said he, hoarsely—“Minna, you are—you are a splendid girl—you—God will bless you !” And then he coughed again and once more left the room. This time he stayed away, although his wife called :

“Pray, come, Brinkmann ; the roast mutton is better than it has been for a long time.”

The old lady seemed cross. She gazed disappointedly at her pale niece. She had taken up her knife and fork and played with the beans on her plate, but she could not eat, courageously as she tried to control herself. I felt that I was not wanted here, ate as quickly as possible, and left the table. But as I went out of the door I heard the old lady



say reproachfully : " But, Minna, so precipitately ; it might have all come right in the end."

" Aunt," replied the young girl, " I must do it on his account."

Toward evening of this day I saw her ; she was walking around the house ; a brown dachshund was playing with her puppies. The droll little things tumbled over and bit at each other, while their dignified mother gave them little reproving bites—it was a charming sight.

She paused under the tall trees on whose leaves the last raindrops still hung, and stood motionless as a statue, with her eyes staring from grief ; she seemed the living image of renunciation. Only her mouth, her little crimson mouth, was not suited to this ; or did I only fancy so because I knew how familiar it was with stolen kisses ?

She had seen me coming, and spoke to me. She talked of the dogs, her great pets, and asked whether I liked it here. Her words sounded very gentle and kind.

I answered only too gladly, and may have remained standing near her longer than she liked, for suddenly she nodded and walked toward the forest. She wore a dark blue gown and a little black apron, while a white shawl was thrown loosely over her beautiful shoulders and fastened with a little gold pin. I have never forgotten how she looked that day, for I really never saw her in any gown but this one during our brief acquaintance.

With darkness life suddenly returned to our house. I heard the maids rushing busily about, and the mistress's orders even in my room.

The maid who had charge of my room came in with a flushed, laughing face, and as I gazed at her in surprise, she cried : " Our young lady is engaged, Mr. von Stetten ; I said so when there were three lights burning in her room on New Year's eve."

“ Louise,” I asked her, as she started to hurry away; “ tell me, did I only dream it, or were some of the ducal family here day before yesterday ? ”

“ You did not dream it ; Prince Max was here.”

“ Does he come often ? ”

“ Every minute,” said she, with the customary exaggeration.

“ And does he stay long ? ”

“ No ; he seldom can stay long. Since he spent the whole autumn here two years ago he only comes for a day or two, but very often.”

“ Indeed. Thank you, Louise.”

“ You are welcome ; ” and she was gone.

At supper I saw the engaged couple. “ Mr. Robert Osswald, owner of the estate of Niebelintz, quite near by,” he was introduced to me as. He was a large, quiet man, with a very sympathetic face, which his full blond beard became excellently, and his eyes shone with a great, tender happiness.

He held his pale *fiancée’s* hand in his constantly, and she treated him as lovingly and gently as would a sister her beloved brother.

The supper was quite a festival. The old gentleman had brought up a couple of dusty bottles of Rhine wine from the cellar, and during the meal there was much talk of the time when Minna had come a little orphan to the lonely house, and had grown to be the joy of all ; and Mrs. Brinkmann, who seemed more and more to forget her grief, made plans for delightful intercourse between Friedrichscastle and Niebelintz. Then conversation turned upon the wedding, and Mr. Osswald said that he had been forced to wait seven years for his bride. This had been a hard probation ; and now, since she had said yes, he wanted the wedding to be in seven weeks, on the 31st of October, his

birthday. "Does that suit you, Minna?" he asked, gazing tenderly at her.

She nodded. "Yes," said she aloud, and again her eyes had a strange, staring look.

And then toasts were drunk to the happy pair. I had to bring my zither and play all the old for-ester's favorite songs. And Minna was urged to sing, but she said that she was not in voice. And the servants came and drank the young couple's



health. I do not remember so distinctly about all this ; I only know that it all seemed unnatural and artificial to me—all this joy, the toasts to the betrothed pair, and the assurances of happiness. Only Mr. Osswald's quiet joy seemed genuine to me.

And now there is little to tell except the conclusion of this story, for during the engagement everything seemed as usual. Osswald rode to the castle many times a week ; she stood in the doorway, or went to meet him, as custom demanded. Once we were all invited to dine at Niebelintz, and after dinner Osswald took his *fiancée* all over the house, from garret to cellar, and Mrs. Brinkmann had nothing to do but thankfully to acknowledge how very fortunate the poor orphan was. The girl was noticeably changed — so pale and thin, but always pleasant and patient ; she seemed firmly resolved to be a good wife to this good man.

She worked from morning to evening ; at times she could not keep her eyes open, so tired was she, and several times I saw her sleeping in broad daylight, her head leaned back against a cushioned chair, the linen upon which she was sewing for her wedding outfit in her hand.

Then I looked at her, and wondered at the delicate lines drawn by grief from her beautifully chiselled nose to the corners of her mouth, but which were invisible when she was awake and exerting all her self-control.

One evening toward the end of September I returned from a hunting expedition at Niebelintz. Besides a bunch of roses and autumn mignonette, I had a number of messages for Miss Brinkmann. Her lover's house was full of company, and he could not come himself.—Ah, this is not so easy to tell.

It was about nine o'clock. The earth was bathed in a perfect flood of radiant moonlight. Even in the forest there was a dim twilight, and bluish-silver patches of light lay on the ground. We had drunk a good deal of champagne at Osswald's, and at first I thought that I was intoxicated when I heard a man's voice speaking passionately in the arbor.

"Minna, Minna, we have borne superhuman trials ; give the man back his freedom. I cannot, I will not lose you. I cannot live without you !"

"I dare not, oh, God, I dare not !" she answered tearfully. "Your Highness, I implore you to give up thinking of me. It is a mistake on your part. In your high position you dare not—" Then a soft, pleading cry: "Max, ah, do not torment me ; do you not see how unhappy I am ? Why did you come ? It will be for the unhappiness of both of us. Do not come back. Please, please, do not come back."

I hurried away. I had suddenly become sober.

Later, when she came from the garden, paler and larger-eyed than ever, and I met her in the hall, I grew crimson like a school-boy discovered in some mischief, and could scarcely give her the messages and hand her the bouquet.

She looked at me quite uncomprehendingly, took the



flowers mechanically, and tottered across the hall to her room.

The next day Minna begged that her wedding might be very private, and take place in the forestry. They promised that it should be as she wished. For days now she did not leave the house. One evening she suddenly turned to me : " Mr. von Stetten, will you accompany me

on a short walk in the woods? I have such a longing for fresh air, and only think, since—since I read recently that the old messenger woman in Brederode was attacked by tramps, I am afraid to go alone.”

“Oh, how you can lie!” I thought, while I bowed and expressed my readiness, and old Mr. Brinkmann cried with a loud laugh: “Being engaged has made you affected, child. Formerly you were not afraid of death or the devil.”

But I walked beside the beautiful girl in the dry, fragrant September evening, and had my own thoughts. We scarcely spoke. Several times when there was a rustle in the thicket I saw her start. Then she would quicken her pace and say something to me in a loud voice, and to please her I answered her as loudly.

So I often became her companion, and aside from her beauty I learned to admire her character. Never has a woman’s heart fought so bravely against an ardent passion as did this girl’s.

She faded perceptibly. I do not know whether the others noticed that she was a different being, that she who had usually laughed at dreams and forebodings became actually superstitious; but I noticed how she liked to turn the conversation to mystic subjects. Did I believe that the dead could ever draw near a beloved being in spirit, and become seen by him?

I laughed at her. When one is twenty years old, one does not believe in ghosts.

But she declared that it was her longing wish to be able to return to this world often after her death, and she believed that when some one left behind here yearned with all the fibres of his being for a dear departed, this desire would be powerful enough to bring the spirit to earth, and *vice versâ*.

Another time, as we passed a stone image of the Virgin, by the roadside, she said: "It is such a comfort to know that one is to leave the world while still young, for it must be fearful to grow old."

"How do you know that you will die young?" I asked, with a smile.

"I do not know," she replied; "but I am firmly convinced that I will do so. In everything that I do, I have the consoling thought that death is not far off."

"Well, that must be calmly awaited," said I. "We can do nothing to prevent it; the strange messenger comes unannounced."

"Certainly," she assented; "and it is a great sin to summon him, a great sin; otherwise—" she broke off. "Many also say it is cowardly," she continued, "but that is not true. There is an existence which demands more courage to continue living than death. Believe me, Mr. von Stetten."

October storms arrived, the leaves changed color and fell, and the hunting fever had so taken possession of me that I was almost lost for my philosophizing friend. Hunting made me weary and unfit for knightly service.

Besides, the preparations for the wedding made great demands upon the women's time, and one sunny day the bridal linen fluttered from the lines, and a dressmaker fashioned rustling silk into a bridal dress for Minna, while she was entertained with chocolate and cakes; and I thought to myself, in a year the girl will be a happy, contented wife, and will laugh heartily at her former romantic fancies.

So the evening before the wedding-day arrived.

According to the bride's wish, the wedding was to be a very quiet one, but some festivities were not to be done away with. There must be a couple of bridesmaids; the

groom's two pretty cousins arrived the day before, and their merry, silvery laughter rang out from the room opposite mine. Minna's only young friend, a pretty blond young wife with bright eyes and a complexion like apple-blossoms, had left husband and child to dress her Minna as a bride, and at her wish shared her room. The girl had persisted in this with unusual obstinacy when her aunt would not listen to it at first, but wished to give the guest a better room. Then the groom's mother, a fresh matron, full of roguishness and kindness, came from Niebelintz. She loved to tell and listen to merry stories, and hated nothing more than drooping of heads, and tears; beside these, a couple of Mr. Osswald's friends came.

These people were assembled about six o'clock in the evening in the Brinkmanns' warm, brightly lighted sitting-room. The whole house smelled of pine, of roast meats and cake. Everything was in confusion when the mother-in-law to be knocked at the bride's door, and called to her that a gypsy girl was there and wanted to tell her fortune, so to come downstairs quickly. The black-eyed cousin had disguised herself most picturesquely as a gypsy, and



when Minna appeared she grasped her hand, and predicted wonders of future happiness; while the other blonde cousin, dressed as a Niebelintz peasant girl, un-

packed all sorts of useful housekeeping things, and recited most charmingly appropriate verses.

They were all very happy, especially Minna's mother-in-law, who had found her match in Mr. Brinkmann, and the two tried to outdo each other in telling the most remarkable stories.

The young men paid attentions to the girls, and then Minna's myrtle vine was pitilessly robbed of all its branches, and the gypsy wound the bridal wreath.

But Minna behaved most strangely. It seemed scarcely possible for her to sit quietly in her wreathed chair. Several times she flushed crimson, glanced at the ceiling, half rose, seated herself again, then stared fixedly before her without hearing the anxious, tender words which Osswald murmured in her ear.

After supper I saw her standing in a window recess. I had brought my album downstairs, and had asked the young girls to write in it, and they had willingly perpetuated their names on its pages. Now I went up to Miss Minna with the same request, which I based upon her speedy departure from the house. She turned her head, and her eyes shone from her pale face like those of a feverish person.

"Did you hear nothing, Mr. von Stetten?" she whispered.

I placed my ear against the window crack and shook my head.

"You hear nothing? Strange. It sounded to me as though some one were coming through the forest—he must be here now."

Her *fiancé* came up, and Minna begged him to write in my album first. He divided the page, and wrote; then she seated herself at the table, and her trembling hand guided the pen. I stood near and watched those trembling fingers.

Then her aunt called me, confided the key of the wine-cellar to me, and asked me to bring up a few more bottles of Rhine wine, for the others were all empty.

As I came up from the cellar—the stairs led down from the hall by a so-called trap-door—I saw, by the dim light of the old three-armed lamp, Minna, in her pale blue silk gown, coming out of the sitting-room. She was evidently on her way to her own room. Suddenly she paused, gazed



at the broad staircase, lying almost wholly in shadow, tottered, pressed her hand to her heart, and would have fallen to the floor had I not sprung to her side and caught her.

“Miss Minna, for God’s sake!” I cried.

“Did you not see him?” she asked, shaking with terror. “My God—there—there he still stands!”

I had seen nothing.



"It was your shadow or mine, Miss Minna," I said loudly. She drew herself up, and without saying a word she went back to the guests.

What had she seen?

And suddenly, like lightning, the thought flashed to my mind—the prince!

None of the guests had left the room. I looked in; no one was missing. Perhaps some one had crept in; but that was impossible, for as I turned the knob of the outside door I found that the door was locked. The rear entrance opened into the kitchen, and no one could have come in by that unnoticed this evening, for the servants were celebrating there, and dancing to the notes of a harmonium, so that the sand on the floor crunched under their feet.

I went up to the room usually occupied by the prince, and listened, but there was no sound. I ventured to turn the door-knob softly; the key was turned in the lock. Of course she had been mistaken.

My mind at ease, I returned to the sitting-room, and went up to Miss Minna to thank her for writing in the album, and I now read what she had written.

"It is so sad," I remarked to her; but she did not answer. "Listen—some one is walking around upstairs," she whispered to me. She looked wretchedly.

The carriage which was to take the groom, his mother, and his guests to Niebelintz now drew up. Loud, happy leave-takings followed.

The betrothed pair remained behind for a moment in the deserted room. I looked through the open door and saw Osswald try to draw the girl to him, and how she pushed him away with both hands, then seized the frightened man by the arm to beg his forgiveness; and thus they, too, came out into the hall.

“Forgive me, Robert, please forgive me,” I heard her say.

And with tender pity he took the beautiful face between his two large hands, and kissed her on the forehead.

“For the last time, farewell, Minna.”

“For the last time,” repeated she, mechanically.

She followed him out into the stormy night, and stood on the steps. Her aunt brought her back, scolding her good-naturedly, and told her to go to her room. Laughingly the young wife sprang after her, and soon the door closed behind the two.

The rest of us sought our beds, for it was almost midnight.

I tossed on my bed sleeplessly. It was a strange night; as though a thousand invisible spirits pervaded the old house. There was a rustling, creaking, and groaning behind the tapestries, in the beams and old furniture. Meanwhile I saw constantly before me the bride's pale face, and her eyes telling of an unnamable horror. The shadow that she had seen on the stairs would not leave my thoughts. The storm howled in the bare branches of the trees, and turned the weather vane on the gable, while Minna's strange question, and her writing in the album, which seemed so desirous of death, rang in my ears.

She has arrived at that point where intelligence ceases and madness begins, I told myself, and was frightened at my own thoughts.

At length I fell asleep.

Suddenly I was awakened by a woman's scream outside in the hall, and there was something in this scream which hurried me from my bed, and made me rush downstairs as soon as I could throw on some clothes.

Mrs. Brinkmann came from her bedroom with horrified face, and disappeared into Minna's room as noiselessly as a ghost ; a few minutes later the old man hurried quickly and noiselessly past me. The maid came down the stairs and paused beside me, her teeth chattering.

"For heaven's sake, sir, what—what—has happened?" she stammered.

I knew nothing. I only knew that something terrible had happened.

Then old Mr. Brinkmann came out again, and walked to the sitting-room as though completely crushed. I followed him, and he sank into the old leather arm-chair beside the cold stove, and did not move.

"Mr. Brinkmann," I said at length, "please tell me——"

He groaned, and raised his head. In the cold, gray dawn of the winter morning his face was like that of a dead man.

"Dead—the child is dead." The last words he almost screamed, and then he buried his face in his hands, and his huge form shook. It was as though the storm had struck an old weather-beaten oak.

She had been his darling, his sunshine, his fawn. I cannot remember the thousand pet names which he used to give her.

The old gig drove up before the house ; it was to be sent after a physician, and to notify the groom. The question arose : "Who will tell him?" The old man was as if paralyzed, the coachman not a suitable messenger ; then it was decided that Minna's friend should bear the sad news, and I accompanied her.

I hurried to dress myself for the sad drive. When I went to the carriage the young lady already sat in it. In accordance with her warm-hearted, excitable nature she

wept violently and incessantly. I sat silently beside her, for she had answered my questions as to how and when the girl's death had occurred, only with violent weeping and a silent shake of the head.

But finally, when the gables of Niebelintz showed above the tree-tops, she said : " Oh, dear God, if he asks me how she died ! "

" How did she die, madam ? How can one die so quickly ? " I asked.

She turned her tear-stained face toward me : " Yes, if I only knew ! She was so excited yesterday evening, and did not want to go to bed. She ran about the room, wringing her hands. ' Anna, it is too hard. ' I did not know what she meant, laughed at her, and told her of my happiness, of my wedding, and talked of all sorts of things, until finally I succeeded in persuading her to get into bed. I did the same, and, as I was very tired, fell asleep.

" Suddenly I awoke. It was just one o'clock. I was wakened by a scream. ' Max—for God's sake ! ' she cried. I thought she was dreaming, and called to her to waken her. But as there was no sound I struck a light, and then—one sob, a smile, and the face over which I bent became strangely rigid, the hand I clasped so heavy. Oh, this unfortunate acquaintanceship with the prince ! " And she began crying again.

Behind us now rang out the sound of horses' hoofs, the rolling of a coach, and the post for Friedrichsberg, which left the little capital at half-past three o'clock in the morning, overtook us. The driver greeted our old coachman and called something to him. " What do you say ? " I cried, sitting up in the carriage ; and turning round, and placing his hand to his mouth, the man called back : " Our Prince Max shot himself last night. "

My neighbor and I stared at each other's pale faces.

"It is a coincidence—a fearful—" I stammered.

She shivered slightly.

"Coincidence?" said she hoarsely; "that a coincidence? No; if you say that, you do not know the story of Minna's life. A coincidence—oh, no!"

I gazed silently at Niebelintz; the first rosy light of the sun fell upon its walls, and at this moment the flag was hoisted on the tower, that it might flutter merrily on this day of joy for its owner. But he himself—the groom—stood at an open window and gazed out into the distance with a grave smile, over where behind the beech forests he knew his bride was. He did not hear the rolling of wheels, he did not see us, he had no suspicion of what had befallen him. I said to my companion: "But they did not love each other." She replied: "The union of spirit, the communion of the soul was lacking in them. How can he suspect anything?"

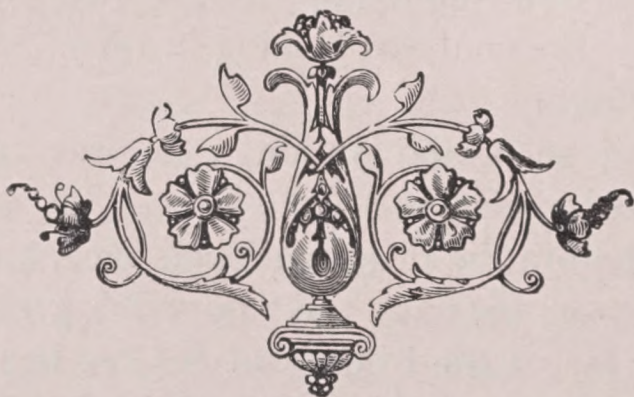
No, he had suspected nothing; he was such a plain, honest, every-day man.

He stood before the dead with pale face, and wiped the tears quietly from his eyes. He bore his grief in silence, but he never forgot the bride who died of heart disease in the first hour of her wedding-day. He never married, and even to-day tends her grave with touching care. "We win only to lose. Everything blooms but to wither and die," stands on her tombstone.

"Grandfather," asked I, as he was silent, "do you believe in this coincidence?"

"No," answered the old man, and his blue eyes flashed at me from beneath their white brows. "I believe only in God's wise guidance."

This was something different, but I saw that he did not wish to talk with me upon this subject any longer. He took the album, put it back in his desk, and said : “ You shall have it, child, when I am dead, but you must keep it carefully.” I do so, and never do I take the shabby little book in my hand without thinking of the beautiful Minna Brinkmann.





III.

AN OLD PICTURE.

IT is a Sunday afternoon in March. It is snowing ; the wind blows the flakes before it, little sharp flakes which sparkle like diamonds in the solitary sunbeam which peeps out from the dark clouds as though in astonishment at such weather, which by right belongs to January but not to March. The hyacinths and crocuses gaze out cheerfully at the snow-storm from behind the double windows. They know that they will not be harmed. They sit behind the large, transparent panes of glass like distinguished ladies.

It is fearfully lonesome ; I know that no visitors will come. It is a storm which deprives one of all desire to go out, and every one has something on hand for Sundays, some relatives to visit, but those who have no family nor relatives must be alone. What shall I do ? Oh, let us revel in old recollections.

I take a key and am about to unlock a drawer in my writing-desk containing letters from long-forgotten times : my eyes chance to fall upon a photograph on the wall, an insignificant picture in a black frame, greatly faded, for it is twenty-three years old, and a faded pink ribbon fastens it to the nail.

Strange ! The picture hangs there year in and year out ; I see it every day, and look at it so seldom. Now I take it down, and as I gaze at it tears suddenly fill my eyes. Ah, the beautiful golden days to which it owes its origin ! those days when the faded ribbon was bright pink, and fluttered from the shoulder of my first ball gown—golden days, whither have you fled ?

Seven young girlish heads rise in front of the folds of a studio portière before which we were grouped picturesquely by the photographer Hans Eyler in the good old city of R——, where I passed my early youth. And we seven formed “the wreath.” We were an innocent girlish band, happy as little fish in the cool rapid mountain stream which rushed past our little city.

All these faces wear a radiant expression, and the eyes seem dreaming of future blissful days ; each mouth wears the bright smile of youth. The pale little girl is Julie, the brunette Doris ; that roguish little *nez retroussé* belongs to Selma, and that beautiful, slender creature is Franziska ; there is Rose, there Minna, and here am I.

What has life brought us ? Ah, we have all been quite roughly treated ; each has her load to bear. Most of us are married and now have children nearly grown, and think of future sons-in-law. Each year we remember our wreath sisters at birthdays, and write in a letter of congratulation that we are about as usual, that the children have been sick again, that we are gradually growing gray-haired, but, thank God, have nothing to complain of.

Yes, we know about each other, except of one of whom we have heard nothing for years. She was different from the rest of us, and decidedly the bright particular star of our little circle, the “beautiful Franzi” with the wonderful chestnut hair, and her clear, enthusiastic blue eyes.

She was the gayest of us all, full of moods and caprices.

Franziska von Schlehen was her name. Her father had had a large estate, and after surrendering this to his son, had come to the city with his wife and daughter and had there bought a pretty, old-fashioned house. Behind this house lay a beautiful garden, extending to the little river, on the other side of which was the shooting place which, every year, for two weeks was changed into a gay camping ground at the time of bird-shooting.

The eldest sister was already married. Franzi, at her mother's wish, was one day solemnly received into our circle. But the mother died after Franzi had been with us but a few days, and her death and burial excited much gossip in the city. Mr. von Schlehen had married her against the wishes of his family. She had been somewhat "strange" before this. After his marriage Mr. von Schlehen had separated himself wholly from his old friends, and even from his own family, and had lived on his solitary estate with his young wife; some people even said that Baroness von Schlehen had been deeply melancholy, and had had but occasional cheerful moments, and that she had suffered terribly from her husband's pride. But no one knew anything definite.

For four weeks after her mother's death we saw nothing of Franzi; then she came to see us again, dressed in deep mourning, and the beautiful, mournful girl was now made much of by us. We were all in our eighteenth year, except Franzi; she was the only one who had already celebrated her eighteenth birthday. At that time we knew her but slightly, yet she was very interesting to us.

Gradually she thawed in her manner, and three months later the old coachman of the Schlehens came to bring to "the wreath" a formal invitation from Franzi to the house.

We were, of course, eager to make the acquaintance of

the baronial household, and admired everything : the handsome furniture, carved and adorned with the family coat of arms, the family portraits, the silver, hangings, even the noiseless movements of the servants. The magnificent garden, in which the grapes were just ripe, excited our greatest admiration. We thought the summer-house, with its walls, upon which were painted scenes from the story of



Paul and Virginia, magnificent. But what pleased me most of all was the view from the lawn, under the linden-trees, across the river to the shooting grounds.

“Listen, Franzi. Next year, at the grand shooting match, you must ask ‘the wreath’ here,” proposed Doris ; “then we can all watch it from here.”

Franzi laughed. “If papa will permit me ! He is so vexed about the whole match, for last year several men—

regular tramps, you know—crossed the river to steal our vegetables for their dinner.”

“How did they do it?” asked Selma.

“That is no great feat,” said Franzi. “The stream is not two feet deep at this spot.”

“That is alarming,” said I.

“This year papa will have the garden watched.”

“I am afraid of this class of men,” remarked Doris, who had a very anxious mother.

“I am not at all,” declared Franzi. “I was even once on the point of falling in love with a circus rider.”

We all laughed.

“It is really true,” she asserted, without smiling.

“But when? You have always been in the country,” I said.

“Not always,” said she softly, and her pale face flushed delicately. “I was with my aunt in Brunswick for a long time.”

“Aha! And that was why you were sent home on such short notice?” said Minna teasingly.

“No, indeed!” cried she violently. “I came because mamma longed for me.” And now she was very pale.

“Good gracious, you told us yourself, only a little while ago, that you travelled at a moment’s notice,” said the little blonde apologetically.

“Do you know,” the sensible Doris interrupted, “one of the laws of our circle is that we must have no secrets from each other? Come into the house, and Franzi will tell us the story.”

“I have nothing to tell,” said she roughly; “but you are right, our cream is waiting for us, and as it is so cool, papa has given me a bottle of sweet Hungarian wine—there will be a thimbleful for each of us. So come.”

When we had eaten the cream in the brightly lighted

room, and drunk the wine—there was just enough to make us all a trifle excited—Doris suddenly said to our charming hostess: “Do you know, Franzi, the circus-rider idea is too stupid; if you are fond of horses, and wish to marry some one who is interested in them, pray fall in love with a hussar officer.”

Franzi threw back her head. “There is no hussar officer as charming as he!” she cried quickly, but then paused abruptly, for the old Baron von Schlehen, and his



sister, who had kept house for him even before the death of his invalid wife, entered the room to greet us.

I have never seen such a handsome old brother and sister. He, still a stately man, although past seventy, was a true cavalier: somewhat silent and unapproachable, very polite, and also very proud. Every one knew that it was not until after years of opposition, and only when his eldest daughter became very ill, that he gave his consent to her marriage to a landed proprietor of the neighborhood

who was not a nobleman, and even now he spoke of this marriage with striking coldness.

The sister, his very image, was even more proud and aristocratic, although she welcomed Franzi's friends with winning words.

We were silent and shy as long as the two remained, and answered the questions put to us in low tones. We were descendants of plain burgher families and were abashed by so much pride and distinction. The only one who broke the stillness was I, for I broke into a short, nervous laugh at thought of Franzi's circus-rider love-affair; as the old gentleman gazed at me in surprise, I paused, flushing crimson, and bent over my fancy work again.

We were relieved of their presence in a quarter of an hour. We made our courtesies to them both, then the old gentleman chivalrously offered his arm to his sister, and left the room. We drew long breaths of relief—Franzi, especially. She leaned back in her chair and fanned herself with her pocket handkerchief.

"Are you so warm?" asked one of us.

"I am always warm in my aunt's presence. Really, I should be cold, but I always have to use every effort to keep from stamping my foot and screaming, when she sits near me. My very finger-tips tingle; I should like to do something to rob her of her composure—this magnificent, stiff, horrible composure which she designates 'good manners.'"

The beautiful face looked seriously angry.

"I only wish each one of you had to live here for twenty-four hours with this so-called 'etiquette'; but you would not bear it for twenty-four hours. Oh, and I, who in my childhood made friends on the sly with the daughters of papa's shepherd, and knew no greater pleasure than to run into the thickest depths of the forest, away from my

governess, where the old woodman, Gottlieb, shared with me his potatoes roasted in the ashes—I now sit here in this old house, under the eyes of my aunt ; and this house is in the worst corner in the world, and I have nothing, nothing but the tiresome garden, and——”

“ But you have us,” said I reproachfully.

“ But after what struggles ! Had not my darling sick mother said : ‘ Egon, she must have young friends, pray let her—’ I never could have associated with you.”

We were silent, more or less offended.

“ Do you know,” she continued, “ you must not be vexed with me for that. Papa, as well as aunt, knows very well that I would rather kill myself than give up my ‘ wreath sisters.’ ” And she held out her hand to the girl sitting nearest her, and looked at the others with tears in her eyes.

“ It was foolish for me to tell you, but I had another quarrel with aunt to-day. She thought it necessary to stay with us all the time you were here, and then—then I was so violent.”

“ But why should she ? Do we need to be watched ? We want to be alone together,” asked Doris.

“ Well, you see,” said Franzi, “ I was so angry, so angry : I declared that I would rather give up having the wreath meet at our house, and then she finally stayed away.”

Our delight in the baronial mansion was somewhat dampened, and on the way home we confessed to each other that we “ did not come from the streets,” and that our fathers were men of high rank in the city, and that they were fully as important personages as was Baron von Schlehen. Of course, Franzi, poor thing, should not suffer from our vexation.

We made all the more of her from that hour ; and as she could not share our pleasures, our charming expeditions in

the forest, our moonlight picnics, where we danced with our brothers, the young merchants and lawyers of the city, as well as our balls and entertainments, we had promised ourselves that we would not sadden her with descriptions of all these delights. The baron did not move in our so-called first circles of society. He and his sister associated only with the three noble families residing in our little city. One of these consisted of a middle-aged married couple—he, a pensioned officer, who had come here for the sake of economy, with a troop of children, five boys and four girls, the eldest of them being but fourteen. The whole city knew that they were poor, and did not believe the captain's wife when she declared that she thought barley soup healthier than meat.

The head of the second family was a Russian nobleman, who had remained here because his wife had died and been buried in our little city, while on a tour. He had a very humpbacked son, who went to school, and he associated with no one but the Schlehens.

Then there was the old Freifrau von Berlewitz, a splendid woman, who willingly came to our houses, together with her seven rather old baroness daughters, who made no secret of the fact that they earned their pocket money by their handiwork. But as the youngest of these was thirty-eight, Franzi could not enjoy her society, and so preferred to languish alone.

Besides these three families, Baron von Schlehen had called upon the judge, and as this judge was my uncle, I enjoyed the especial privilege of seeing Franzi, aside from the meetings of our little club, and occasionally receiving a note by Peter: "Come, I implore you; I am dying with loneliness." But still we never became true friends. There was something about Franzi which at the same time attracted and repulsed me.

A fearfully passionate nature was concealed in this girl. Sometimes I thought its flames would consume her delicate frame ; and then there was something so strange about her, something I could not understand, and which made me blush, nevertheless.

Our lives were so simple. First school, then house-keeping, then the suitor with sufficient means to support a wife, then the marriage altar, etc. We never thought that there could be different lives. Franzi thought such commonplace. She wished a great love-affair ; she had read "Werther," and recited bits from it to me, and then she had another book. Heaven knows where she had gotten it—the craziest thing that I ever read. I have forgotten both title and author, but the story was of the daughter of a count who fell in love with a handsome robber chief, and for his sake left her father's castle and all the splendor of her high rank to live in the forest with him.

"Do not be absurd," said I ; "there is nothing of the kind now. That is a book for old crazy people "

"There is not? Certainly not for you, but I am no every-day being. Of course, it is a little too much to run away with a robber chief, but——"

"So you think nothing of the running away itself?" asked I.

"No," said she shortly. "If one loves some one very dearly—then——"

"Oh, Franzi, Franzi !"

She made no answer. After a while she began to speak of other things.

Gradually, as I saw more of her, I formed an idea of her youth in the old castle in the Harz Mountains far from all intercourse, in rigid, aristocratic seclusion. I saw the child sitting for hours at a window, staring out into the dis-

tance with questioning, longing eyes. I saw her in the forest left to herself for hours, dreaming under the trees ; and I saw her in the twilight of a winter day, creeping softly into the library to take a book away with her to her bedroom—one of those deluding, wicked books which had turned her beautiful little head. Her mother was ill, her father saw her only at meals, and her nurse had a sweetheart. Franzi, even as a child, had seen them kiss each other, when she was told to pick flowers. And her governess ! “ You think, Marie, that I did not know that she had a rendezvous, when she put on her long dark waterproof in the evening, and said to me, ‘ Go to sleep, mademoiselle ; I will be back in three minutes. You *must* be asleep when I come back.’ Oh, you may believe that she was not back at twelve o’clock. I know, too, who—but papa turned her out of the house, he would have no governess for daughter-in-law.”

“ Oh, I do not want to know anything more about it,” said I, painfully affected by what I had heard.

“ And my poor sister ! She was so foolish ! I would have managed quite differently. I would have been married secretly to Rudolf ; one fine day I would have left the castle. She was angry with me when I advised her to do so, and preferred to torment herself for two years ; and not until she became very ill would papa say yes. And papa——”

“ Please show me your mother’s picture,” I pleaded. And we crept into the house on tiptoe—her father and aunt were in the garden—and went up-stairs to the baron’s room. It was a large apartment ; some of the furniture, the chandelier, even the picture frames, were made of antlers. On the writing-desk hung the large oil painting.

“ How very beautiful ! ” I whispered, gazing at the life-size figure of the slender woman in tight-fitting riding

habit, a large mastiff at her side. From beneath the broad-brimmed, feather-trimmed hat Franzi's sweet face looked out, so similar that it might have been painted for her, feature for feature—the same nose, the full, rosy lips, the dimple in the chin, the blue eyes.

“My darling mother,” sighed the girl. “She was always ill. She never received visitors. I never think of her except on a lounge. We loved each other so dearly; but aunt hated my mother.” The girl's hands clinched. “Believe me, had it not been for aunt, papa would have treated mamma and us quite differently.”

Softly we crept down-stairs again.

“Give me your hand,” she asked another time, as she visited me with tear-stained eyes, in the twilight one fine evening.

I gave her my hand.

“So! I thank you. You must betray to no one what I am now going to confide to you. Do you know, I can no longer bear life at home. I am going away.”

“For heaven's sake, where?”

“That I do not yet know.”

I begged and implored her to give up this idea. And whether my terror touched her, or I found the right words to move her heart, she fell on my neck with tears, and promised to give up such thoughts; but I must promise to come to see her oftener, to be a faithful, silent friend. At eighteen years one is willing and ready to make sacrifices; one still believes in wonders which she can accomplish. I resolved to rescue my friend.

“Franzi,” I began, “you must be sensible. You must not read so much; do something about the house.”

She laughed. “The work is all planned out; our servants are excellent, and I could find nothing to do. Papa would not tolerate it; neither would aunt.”



“Then teach some poor children, or shall we do it together. Will you?”

“Yes, yes!”

Three times she came, and worked eagerly; at the fourth lesson she did not appear. “Oh, darling,” she wrote at the fifth time, “do not be vexed if I do not come. It makes me so nervous, and the children you chose are so terribly stupid.”

I gazed at the little flaxen-haired creatures compassionately. Yes, to be sure, patience was needed here, but I had wished to exercise my beautiful fly-away in this very virtue. She came another day, not in the slightest troubled as to whether I had been offended by her staying away, and told me with much irony that yesterday she had been to tea with Baroness Berlewitz—she and her aunt; and the seven old-maid daughters had sat there and listened reverently to the conversation of the two old ladies. Old Baroness Berlewitz had talked of past splendor and magnificence, and she and Aunt Barbara—Franzi’s aunt’s name was Barbara—had discovered quantities of common friends, and finally had become greatly excited.

“Oh, I was almost bored to death! Good gracious, Marie, if I am to fade here like the Berlewitz baronesses——”

“Oh, you will not,” said I smilingly. “You will go out into the world.”

“How, then?”

“You will surely travel.”

“No, indeed! Our circumstances no longer permit it; my brother arranged that,” said she bitterly.

“Well, surely your brother, as heir to your possessions, entertains?”

“Papa and we—we are angry with him, because he—bah—what concern is it of mine——”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ No, I see no outlet, absolutely none. I will take an opiate and sleep away my youth.” She laughed. “ Or shall I—” she looked at me roguishly.

“ What ? ”

She came quite close to me. “ Shall I take him ? ”

“ Whom ? ”

“ The Pastor von Mühlen ! ”

“ Goodness ! ” said I, gazing at her with wide-opened eyes, and suddenly a great light seemed to dawn upon me. Mr. von Mühlen was a young clergyman who had been our old pastor’s assistant for some months—a quiet, awkward man, with a pale face and long blonde hair, who drew crowds of listeners to the church, where he expressed the opinion from the pulpit that our respectable city was nothing more than a Sodom or Gomorrah. In his glowing young zeal he visited the people in their houses, and told them that they did not sufficiently honor the Sabbath when they went to walk Sunday afternoons. He founded young men’s and young women’s associations, and knew exactly who was absent from service on Sundays. Besides, he was through and through a man of honor, and the whole city agreed that when his zeal had given place to calmer views he would make an excellent pastor, and the best preacher who had ever stood in the chancel of St. Servatius’ Church.

“ Him ? ” I asked. “ Does he want to marry you ? ”

“ That depends only upon myself,” she replied. “ For two weeks he has daily been our guest ; papa, aunt, and he are of one heart and mind.”

She seated herself at the window of my little room, and before I could make any reply she said : “ Let us take a walk ; it is so delightful out-of-doors.”

My mother gave her consent, and we walked along the

city walls, which had been turned into a promenade. She paused in front of St. Servatius' Church ; it was in a quiet, green square, which the promenade led past. Formerly it had been a churchyard ; now handsome old lindens, just putting out their first leaves, grew there ; under the trees



were stone benches, around one of which, where sat an old lady taking the air, several children played. The church door was open, so that the warm spring air might come into the lofty building. The parsonage adjoined it, with its bright windows, behind which, in the upper story, hung the snow-white curtains of the old pastor's wife. Downstairs lived the assistant, Mr. von Mühlen.

"See," said she; "from this house to the church, and from the church back to the house, would be my path of life."

"Oh, life is not confined to this short path, Franzi. Behind those windows would be your world, and for all its smallness, it could yet be so large and beautiful."

"Do you think so?" she asked, and gazed at me earnestly. "Sometimes I think so, too," she continued; "but then—then it seems to me as though the walls of this narrow city were falling upon me. Oh, I think I am spoiled, quite spoiled for anything good."

While she spoke, she had walked on quickly, and as we turned into the promenade again, just at the turn of the street, we met Doris, and she suddenly flushed crimson.

"What brings you here?" asked Franzi.

"I am going to see Aunt Rosemann," stammered Doris.

Franzi laughed. "That is the nearest way, little sly-boots!"—she lived at the opposite end of the city—"you probably mistook St. Servatius' for St. Mary's."

Doris had already recovered herself. "Every one can go where she chooses."

"You are right."

"I did not ask you what brought *you* here."

"No, you did not."

"We were taking a walk," I chimed in, and gazed closely at Doris. Surely she was not interested in our young rector!

"I hope you will have a pleasant one," said Doris, abruptly taking leave of us.

"Good-by!" we called, and walked on.

At the next meeting of "the wreath" there was a certain unmistakable strained relation.

"I thought you went to St. Mary's?" Franzi asked Doris, apparently innocently.

“So we do,” said the latter, gazing past Franzi.

“How do you happen to come to St. Servatius’ so often?”

“I suppose I can go to whatever church I like?”

“Of course; pray excuse me, Doris.”

Doris’ eyes were full of tears. I believe she would have given much to be a member of St. Servatius’ congregation, and thus better able to guard the secret of her heart.

Sunday after Sunday, Franzi sat in her pew beside Aunt Barbara with the same pale face, and Sunday after Sunday Mr. von Mühlen dined with Baron von Schlehen.

“Franzi,” said I one day—she had sent for me, and we sat together under the linden in her father’s garden, chatting—“tell me, how do matters stand with you and Mühlen?”

She was lounging lazily in one of the deep garden chairs, and gazed over the low wall at the meadow, where a number of workmen were busy erecting booths for the shooting festival. “Well,” she replied, “it will be as I said.”

“Has he confessed his wish to you?”

“Not to me, but to aunt.”

“And you?”

“I have asked for time to consider the matter, until—until the first of August.”

“To-day is the twelfth of July. Has he consented to wait?”

“How can he do otherwise?” said she. And changing the subject, she added: “That will be a gay scene, over there. Only look, look! These huge wagons, these houses on wheels! It must be a gay life to go all over the world thus. Look, Marie, they actually have flowers and curtains to the windows of their wheel-houses, and—yes, a canary bird! Can you read what is printed on that wagon?” she asked.

I glanced in the direction where, before one of the largest booths, stood a true castle of a van. "Circus of Giacomo Arditì," I read.

She did not answer. I had never given a second thought to Franzì's remark that she had once almost fallen in love with a circus rider; even at this moment I did not think of it, but only much later. We both gazed at the old lady coming slowly down the path, accompanied by Mr. von Mühlen.

They seated themselves near us, in the shadow of the linden.

It was a warm, delightful afternoon. Below us—the bank sloped down steeply here—the water murmured with a cool, refreshing sound, the meadow was bathed in sunlight, and the gay voices of the workmen came over to us; the bright scene was framed in by tall trees, behind which rose the mountains.

"The devil of enjoyment is about to take possession over there," said Aunt Barbara, giving the workmen, who with loud calls were raising a large circus tent, a side glance. "The wicked people will spend their small savings for that," she continued, "and let the churches fall to rack and ruin. What do you think of this popular festival, Mr. von Mühlen?"

But he did not answer. His near-sighted blue eyes gazed as warmly and tenderly as his spectacles made possible at the beautiful girl opposite him. He was so absorbed in watching her, so wholly the lover, and so little disposed to anathematize and condemn, that he even did not hear Aunt Barbara's cough.

"H'm! H'm!" said she, still more loudly.

He started with an alarmed, "Yes, yes, my dear baroness—the Bible says——"

But what it says in this case remained concealed from us,

for on the other side of the river a rider sprang across the meadow, and close to the water : a slender, elegant-looking man, on a white horse, evidently thoroughbred—the animal's silky tail almost touched the greensward. Although no longer young, it was still a beautiful creature,



and carried the magnificent little head so proudly and lifted the small feet so gracefully ; evidently, it must once have been of great value. And the man who sat upon it was one with the horse—it would be impossible to fancy a more perfect rider. Evidently he was exercising the horse, for the tent was not yet raised, and so our little group enjoyed an exhibition which would delight any connoisseur.

Then a man came running across the field, and called to the rider : “ Mr. Arditì, the carpenter wishes to speak to you,” and the horse dashed away at a mad gallop.

“ Bravo ! ” said the baron, who had just joined us, and stared over at the field with a peculiar light in his eyes, and then he began to ramble on confusedly—almost as though he were talking to himself—that this white horse was very similar to one he had seen years before—it could not be alive now—at Renz, and for which he had offered an absurd price. “ I wanted him for a saddle-horse for—well—for a lady,” he continued. “ The first lady rider in the circus rode him at that time.—It was not the animal’s fault, he was a good-tempered horse, but he has the death of his rider on his conscience—threw her head first against a hurdle—she was killed instantly.”

“ A fearful death,” said Aunt Barbara, giving her brother, so absorbed in his recollections, an angry glance.

“ A beautiful death ! ” said Franzi. “ To be cut off in one’s full strength, during the most charming pleasure——”

The young pastor coughed.

“ We pray every Sunday that we may be delivered from a sudden, unprepared death,” said Aunt Barbara.

Franzi lowered her head blushing, and gave me a supplicating glance.

Mr. von Mühlen soon took leave, and it was time for me, too. I remained behind with Franzi for a moment ; she stared after the clergyman’s thin form with a frown. His long frock-coat fluttered about his angular frame as awkwardly as possible.

“ Oh, Marie, I am bad, I am bad,” said she. “ Now my whole nature cries, ‘ No ! No ! ’ Depend upon it, if I take him there will be misery, great misery.”

“ Then say no, if that is your opinion.”

“ Yes, you are right. But listen ; I have such a longing

for peace, for sunshine coming through bright windows into a cosey, homelike room ; for some one who is good, very, very good, and would say to me, ‘ My poor little Franzi, I am with you ’—upon whose breast I could lean my wild, silly head and could cry out all that torments me here ! ” She pressed her hand to her heart.

At this moment she looked so piteous that I threw my arm around her. “ Poor little Franzi, then pray take him ; he is good, very good, believe me ! ”

She buried her face in her hands, and tears trickled through her fingers. “ Yes, yes, he is, and he inspires me with confidence, and I so need a firm hand, but—but——”

“ But ? ”

“ Oh dear, if he only were a little bit handsomer ! ”

Although I was vexed, I could not keep from laughing. “ Oh, you child, you ! ” said I reprovingly. “ Do what you choose ! ”

“ Do not go away angry ! ” she pleaded, walking beside me, and wiping away her tears.

“ No, no. Good-by. Quiet your heart ; say yes. A thing once settled brings peace.”

She sighed, and stared at the ground, and as I closed the door behind me I saw her still standing in the great, dimly lighted hall.

A few days later the shooting festival was in full swing. The city was in confusion ; every one visited the shooting place, and we of course wished to go too. Everywhere on the street corners were posted huge bills advertising the spectacles, but the circus bill-posters surpassed all others in size and glaring colors.

“ It must be splendid,” said my big brother. “ I am going this evening. They have a wonderful rider.”

My father wished to buy seats for mamma and myself,

but I declined to go, for I have been afraid of horses all my life.

The next day, the weekly papers contained great praises of the circus.

“The wreath” met at our house the next afternoon. Mr. von Schlehen had not allowed his daughter to invite us to his house, because of the doings at the rear of his garden; and so we sat in our garden, which had no view except of barns and houses, and dipped our *zwieback* in our thin coffee—mother said that stronger was bad for our complexions.

Toward evening, Peter came to fetch the baroness. She whispered to me: “Do not contradict me.” Then she said aloud: “Come again at ten o’clock, Peter; I will stay here this evening.” And Peter went away. That suited me very well, for my parents were invited to a silver wedding, and my brother had gone to the circus. So I pressed her hand joyfully when the man had gone.

“That is nice of you, Franzl.”

“Oh, I am not going to stay here—you must come with me.”

“Where?”

“To the circus.”

“The circus? We two alone? No, indeed! And only think, you as the future wife of a pastor——”

“Oh, it is just that! Papa and aunt simply forbade me to go. But I *will* go, and you must come with me; no one will recognize us; we will wear veils. I beg you, dear, sweet Marie, do me this favor, and come with me—oh, I beg you. I will never ask you to do anything wrong again—only this once, please, please!”

She teased and pleaded as though her life depended upon the gratification of her wish. Finally I allowed myself to be persuaded, and procured two old shawls, and

with the help of veils in a few minutes we were unrecognizable, and slipped into the street. We chose the way over the promenade. The shadow was so dense under the linden-trees that it would be impossible for any one to recognize us. I paused before the parsonage of St. Servatius.

"See, there is a light in his room," said I.

"Yes, yes," said she; "never mind,—perhaps I will often sit in that room with him; but do not speak of that now. I will—oh, Marie—I will see the other one only once more, only once more!"

I stood still in the dark alley, breathless. "The other?" I stammered.

She seized my hand and drew me on. "Yes, the other one," she whispered. "I told you at that time—of—oh, you know—he is here, I recognized him from the garden. Darling Marie, I am not going to do anything bad, only I must, I must see him a single time more."

"The—the circus rider?"

"Yes—if you call him that."

"I will not go with you—no, indeed, I will not go with you!" I cried, beside myself.

"Very well; if that is your friendship——"

She turned away proudly; then I ran after her. I thought that I must not let her go alone. And where was the harm? We were going to the circus, a place to which my father himself had given me permission to go, and—and——

We soon found ourselves in the crowd in the shooting place. I felt quite miserable. The odor of sausages, mingled with that of little cakes cooked in fat, the exhalations from a great crowd of people, the smell of oil-lamps and torches, the noise of organs and poor singers, the music of the merry-go-round, together with the noise of

criers, and bells of the different booths, all made a double impression upon me, anxious as I was. Then the crowd



around me, and the forcing our way through it, the darkness in spite of the moonlight, the rough voices of some drunken men, all had the effect of robbing me of my powers. Had not Franziska held me firmly by the arm, I believe that I would have sunk to the ground.

Near the circus it was quieter: I might say, more select. The wagons were drawn up in a circle, and from within the tent sounded music—and cries of “Bravo!” The exhibition had begun. Franzi drew me toward a side entrance.

“Where are you going?”

“Here, come in here.”

We entered a covered passage-way; it seemed to lead to the boxes. There was the brilliantly lighted ring. I saw a number of heads in a semicircle. I saw a rider in short skirts standing on the back of a galloping horse:—just at that moment she sprang through a hoop—then Franzi drew me through a small door, and I found myself at the foot of a narrow, steep staircase.

“Up here!” she whispered, and after a moment we stood at the entrance of the ten-cent gallery. There were no reserved seats.

“I am going!” I ejaculated in horror—but I stayed.

An unsaddled horse now stood in the ring—the white horse we had recently seen—and a man in a blue jockey-suit swung himself upon his back—a “picture” of a man,

as I must admit myself. Such a handsome man ! His personality made a wonderful impression upon me ; the crowd filling the huge circus-tent seemed to hold its breath. It was a strange, indescribable spectacle, this horse and this man. What he did, I do not know. I only know that it was beautiful, very beautiful ; that I shared all the trembling ecstasy of the audience, which burst into mad applause as he sprang from the ground upon the back of the horse, which in its furious career seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

A half-suppressed scream came from Franzi's lips, but I heard it quite plainly. Then she disappeared. I only noticed that she was not at my side when a clown entered the ring with a rather coarse jest, and I turned to ask her to go. I rushed down the steep stairs in great alarm. Down by the entrance to the stable she stood—Franziska, Baroness Schlehen ! The veil had fallen from her head, the thick shawl had slipped back, her hands were clasped over her bosom, and she gazed at him, the circus rider, with radiant eyes. And he—he was apparently busy with the Arabian, which a groom held by the bridle, and gazed at her in surprise, almost in confusion.

I shook her arm anxiously. Then she prepared to follow me ; but she turned her head again, and as I, too, looked back I saw him staring after us with the same astonished gaze—saw him take off his little blue-and-white-striped cap with a respectful bow.

“Franzi, you are crazy !” I gasped out. “For heaven's sake, come, come !”

She followed me without a word. And I, when I entered our empty, peaceful sitting-room, began to cry like a child in my alarm.

“What has happened ?” she murmured. “I did nothing.”

“Yes, yes !” I cried.

“Marie, I give you my word that he does not know me. He has no suspicion of who I am. I saw him in Brunswick. I spent all my pocket money on the circus. But—



what are you thinking of ? I—I—he pleases me ; nothing more.”

“And is not that enough ?” I gasped out. “No one should please you any longer.”

“Is that anything wrong ?” she asked, almost humbly. “I can rejoice over beautiful flowers, beautiful horses—why not beautiful men ?”

I made no answer. We sat thus silently by the window when Peter came. The kiss, the hot, burning kiss on my lips was all the farewell I had, and was the last for many a year.

At that time I had no suspicion of what occurred afterward in Franzi’s dark garden, under the linden, by the rush-

ing stream. We did not see each other during the next week. Then, I remember it as distinctly as though it were but yesterday, on a rainy Wednesday, several days after the shooting match, my father came from court, and my brother from school, and they brought into the house the most startling news—news which made my heart almost stop beating in alarm.

“Only think—merciful patience—the girl always seemed to me somewhat high-flown, but——”

“Who?” asked my mother.

“Franzi!”

“Well, he is a fine fellow,” interrupted my brother.

“Only think, poor little Marie, Franzi——”

“Franzi?” I stammered. To-day was the first of August. My thoughts flew to the parsonage, as though seeking help, to the pale, unhandsome young preacher.

“Franzi—forget her, my child—has gone astray—she has—I am sorry that your pure ears should hear of it—she has—she and Signor Arditì, the brother of the director, have——”

“Gone off—eloped!” said my brother, with a laugh.

But I had fainted away.

What I suffered I cannot say. My parents took me to some friends in a larger city. At home I could not recover, for everything reminded me of my lost friend. I do not know how Franzi’s relatives bore the blow; but I learned that her mother had once been a circus rider—that Baron Schlehen had married her against his family’s wishes, and had passionately loved her—the beautiful rider. This fact was some consolation to me. Why, I could not say; probably because it seemed to me some excuse for Franzi’s unheard-of act.

The gossip over this event subsided in time. Probably the only one who thought of Franzi on the day of the wed-

ding of Doris and Mr. von Mühlen was I. She lived very happily, the quiet, grave Doris, with her husband, who has now become as mild as moonlight, and so patient with the faults of his congregation. He is stout and portly, and Doris has had each one of us five wreath sisters stand godmother once. Franzi was no longer reckoned one of us. She was an outcast. I was the only one who at times thought of her. Baron von Schlehen had moved away. Whither, we did not know.

The other "wreath sisters" all destroyed the photograph of the seven of us; they no longer wished to be perpetuated in a picture with Franzi. But I kept it. I felt that I was partly to blame, not for having accompanied her to the circus at that time, but because my feelings had been like hers when I saw her idol; because I, too, although only for a moment, had succumbed to the charm which wholly carried her away.

I was an exception to the rule; instead of becoming a plump matron, I became an authoress, without a husband and a room full of children. But I do not doubt in the least that the others chose the better part—at least, each in turn pitied me for not following her example.

I travel about the world a great deal, and a short time ago I found—but I must be more explicit. It was in a large city on the Rhine, and I was crossing the bridge with my niece. I thought of anything and any one but Franzi.

"Aunt," asked the ten-year-old girl at my side, "will you take me to the circus?"

"Certainly! Is there one here?"

"Yes, it is coming, aunt; the wagons are here already."

It was so, and my heart stood still as I read on the nearest bill-board, "Circus Arditi." Franzi! Franzi! flashed across my mind. Franzi, are you still alive? It was late in the afternoon of a hot summer day; a true golden glory

lay on the Rhine ; the people streamed out of the city gates in throngs. Thoughtfully I walked on.

"Aunt," cried the child, "I forgot to buy the ribbon mamma wanted ; come back to the city."

I went back with her through the darkening streets and entered a fancy-goods store behind the child. A lady in deep mourning stood before the counter. She was slender, and seemed strangely familiar to me.

"Absurd !" I said to myself, for I was thinking of Franzi. Then I started—that was her voice, the peculiar, veiled voice which only she had.

And now she turned. That is her delicate face,—her brown eyes, and especially the eyes ; and yet so different, ah ! the features so different, disfigured with weeping, and furrowed with grief.

"Franzi," said I softly, "do you remember me ?"

She stared at me in astonishment. She only remembered me when I mentioned my name. Then she burst into passionate sobs, which she vainly tried to control.

"Go home," I said to the child ; "tell mamma I have met a friend and will not be back to tea." Then I turned : "Come, Franzi, I will go with you."

She followed me. "We are in the wagon," said she. "I do not know—whether——"

"Yes, of course," said I quickly.



“That I should meet you to-day—” she murmured.

“You are in mourning, Franzi. What loss have you had?”

“The greatest,” said she softly. “He—he—” and she pressed her handkerchief to her lips to suffocate a cry of pain.

In the strange room in the wagon, this jolting, narrow home which she had chosen, instead of the respectable parsonage, I sat beside her. There was almost everything in it—a sofa, table, chairs, flowers, a canary bird, sewing table, stove—oh! I cannot remember what all. Yonder a laurel wreath and withered bouquets, here a gay satin jacket, programmes, hoops, and in the midst of all a mourning woman, her hands buried in the fur of a magnificent white poodle—a genuine circus poodle—sobbed, sobbed; even Doris could not sob more violently were fate to rob her of her pastor husband.

“Franzi, when did he die?”

“Early this morning.”

“Was he ill long, poor soul?”

“He was thrown in Cologne at the exhibition, and—the doctor thought it was nothing serious, and this morning—suddenly——”

“Poor child!”

“He is at the churchyard already,” she whispered, bursting into heart-breaking sobs again. “I could not have him here.”

“Have you children?”

“A son.” She rose. “Marie, you must see him; he is so handsome, as handsome as his father.”

She beckoned out of the window of the van, and soon after a young man of eighteen entered. He was handsome; yes, she was right, very handsome, and good, too, for, unabashed by my presence, he clasped his mother in

his arms, and both wept together. "We loved each other so, we three," he said, turning to me as though in excuse.

Outside in the great tent the music began ; the exhibition had begun. He left the van ; she sat and brooded to herself, without a word.

"Do you," she began at last, "remember how you went with me at that time when I wanted to see him?"

"Yes, Franzi, and I have reproached myself for it a thousand times."

"Why? I have been so happy, so happy! I always wanted to write to you, but—would you have opened a letter from me?"

"I? Yes—but——"

"But your family would not have permitted it. I thought so."

And as, involuntarily, I glanced around, there hung the picture of us, the seven "wreath sisters." "Heavens, what would Mrs. von Mühlen say if she knew that her picture was hanging in a circus van?" I thought.

"I only kept the picture for your sake," said she, as though she had guessed my thoughts.

"And was not life amid such surroundings a bit unusual and hard for you, Franzi?"

"All life is hard," said she gravely; "but I have been happy, happy until to-day. He was so kind and industrious, and so faithful, and—I loved him."

It was late when I rose to go. The crowds had long since gone home from the circus.

"Day after to-morrow, in the morning, we bury him," said she, "quite early."

I went and stood in the dewy churchyard, at the grave of him who was so kind, so industrious, and so faithful. Could there be better praise?

Then she went away. Shall I ever meet her again?

Later, as I stopped in my native city, while on a trip to the Harz Mountains, Doris had a reunion in the parsonage of the old "wreath," as far as was possible. Minna chanced to be there also. She had married an officer, and was spending some weeks with her mother; she was so pale and quiet, scarcely to be recognized.

We talked of various matters. "Girls," said I, suddenly thinking of Franzi, "do you know whom I met on the Rhine? Our Franzi!"

Curiosity, shrugs! "Well, pray tell us about it."

And I did so. They grew quiet, one after another, and Doris had tears in her eyes. When I had finished, her



husband stood in the doorway, but he turned away quickly.

"Poor Franzi!" murmured some one.

"Well, she would not have it otherwise," said another.

"As one makes one's bed, one must lie!" declared Madame Julie, and one could see that she had made her bed very comfortably, on the handsome estate of her husband.

Minna, who had grown so pale, delicate, and grave since her marriage, whispered something ; I do not know whether I understood her rightly. "So kind, so faithful," she repeated. "Happy Franz !"

But Selma, too, must say something. She counted the stitches in her child's stocking, and, beginning a new needle, she sighed out, with a highly satisfied air : "Yes, yes, such is life ! It takes all sorts to make a world ! Thank God, that I know of such things only by hearsay."

She was right ; she scarcely put her little stumpy nose out of her house all the year round, and was famous for her faultless housekeeping and well-bred children.

"But for you," she continued, "it is, of course, a rare bit, for you are a novelist, and on the look-out for things which you can use."





IV.

THE ROMANCE OF AN OLD HOUSE.

IT was about five years ago that I received from the court marshal in Z——, the important commission to renovate a house in the Prince's summer capital, Falkerode, and fit it up for the future residence of Princess Marie, who, after scarcely two years of married life, and not yet twenty-four years old, had returned a widow to her father's court.

This lady possessed an extreme love of art and the beautiful, and was especially partial to the old German style, and wished her home fitted up in accordance with this. She wrote to me personally :

“The beautiful old house in Falkerode, which I wish restored and fitted up for me by you, my dear sir, has been unoccupied for many years. It was built in the best period of the Renaissance, and was once the residence of the Prince's chaplain. When the capital was transferred to Z——, more than fifty years ago, His Highness, my father, had the house closed.

“The old building has always interested me, and I beg you to make it into a comfortable home for me. You will find much damage from neglect, as can be expected ; I

beg you to send me news of the condition in which you find the old building."

On a misty September morning, not long after receiving these lines, an extra post-chaise travelled slowly along the steep road leading through magnificent forests to Falke-rode. The summits of the Harz Mountains were veiled in thick mists, but shone with a silvery radiance which showed that the sun might break forth at any moment. The foliage was still green and luxuriant ; only, at the side of the road the scarlet mountain-ash berries, peeping out from the green leaves, warned one of the approach of autumn. A strange fragrance, which I have never noticed except in the Harz Mountains, came from the forest. All around was solemn stillness, interrupted only by the blow of an axe far in the forest.

I had travelled all night, and consequently was weary, and, I confess, not especially charmed with the prospect of passing six months or more in the Harz Mountains in a former capital which, from all that I heard, was a century behind the times, and the most stupid place in the world. I had become engaged a few weeks before, and, of course, Her Highness's commission was scarcely opportune : my little *fiancée* had even railed heartily at the caprices of princesses ; it sounded almost traitorous, but I fear I should have joined in had not an old pointed gabled house, with massive sandstone façade, corner towers, and all the ornamentation of the best period of the Renaissance, which has as much charm for an architect as a noble deer has for the hunter, or a rare painting for the collector, risen in the background, although at first with very faint outlines. If only it were not so far from D—— ; if, at least, there had been railroad connection between the two places, so that I could sometimes spend Sunday with my betrothed, in her mother's cosey sitting-room. But now I must look for-

ward to the hope of seeing her at Christmas, and that was such a very long time off.

Lost in these thoughts, I had not noticed that we had reached the top of the mountain, and was roused only by the blast from the post-horn. The postilion blew a low song, as though he had guessed my thoughts.

“Farewell, ye eyes so deep and blue,
Which I can gaze into no more”—

I whispered to myself; but then I broke off, and could scarcely suppress an exclamation of admiration. The fog had broken; the wooded mountains rose around me, as though draped in white veils, and from the summit of one of them, in the radiance of the autumn sunshine, rose the stately white castle, with its slender towers standing out magnificently from the dark background of the beech and fir trees. The beautiful scene captivated me. The chaise rolled quickly down the mountain, and then turned, passing a high iron fence into the castle park, comprising hundreds of acres, sloping gently down from the castle to the valley, in shaded solitude, and containing quiet lakes, dense thickets, and beds of rare flowers; while plashing fountains, or the form of a gardener, were the only signs of life which my eyes perceived. Then we drove through an artistic gateway of wrought-iron, past the princely stables to an open place: at our left, bounded by the rock upon which stood the castle, in front and on our right, by numerous outbuildings; while an alley of luxuriant horse-chestnut trees led down to the tiny city, which, with its orchards, nestled at the foot of the mountain.

“Do you know your way here?” I asked the coachman on the box. “I wish to stop at the ‘Deer.’”

The brown face under the broad-brimmed hat gazed at me with a derisive smile.

“I am a Falkerode child, Mr. Architect. My wife has carried messages for thirty-five years up to Bernerode, to all the villages and mills. I know every stone and path around here ; besides, there is but one inn here. The gentleman has no choice ; it lies there, around the corner of the old chaplain’s house.”

He pointed with his whip to a tall, gloomy building. So this was my destination.

It was a massive building, with its sharp-pointed roof and thick, gray old walls ; from the dim panes of the windows even the bright autumn sun could not coax a spark of light. A large façade, with the coat of arms of the princely house—a springing deer crowned the whole—and slated corner towers, with artistically carved niches of sandstone, at the sides of the huge entrance, upon the round arch of which, as we drove quickly past, I could read,

ANNO DOMINI, 1605.

completed the decorations.

I did not rest long in the neat inn. Even the country fare of the primitive *table d’hôte*, which I shared with two travelling salesmen and a forester, could not chain me. I sent the boy in a short jacket, who was pointed out to me as the waiter, to the castellan immediately after dinner with the inquiry, when he would take me over the chaplain’s house. For I had been told to apply to this castellan, as he had received orders to accompany me.

The old man had gone across the country to the christening of a grandchild, the waiter breathlessly reported to me ; his wife had rheumatism, and could not very well go with me ; but if I would wait until four o’clock, Dorchen would be back from the city by that time, and could open the house for me.

What was left for me ? I must wait for Dorchen, and

the four hours must be passed in some manner. I wrote a long letter to my *fiancée*, but when, after finishing it and putting it in the post-bag, I looked at my watch, it was just twenty-five minutes of three. I therefore took hat and cane, with the intention of roaming around awhile.

On the open square below the castle it was as solitary as before : only a few children, bound on a berrying expedition, crossed it on their way to the woods, and a young forester, a large dog following closely at his heels, disappeared whistling into a house decorated with deer antlers.

“The head forester’s house, I suppose,” I murmured to myself, and gazed over the square, bounded by buildings. What a strange assemblage ! Adjoining the old Renaissance building of the chaplain stood a two-story house, also in rococo style, seeking to disguise its decrepitude, like some old beauty, under pale pink paint and white stucco garlands ; then the neat little forestry, built in Swiss style, and here—what was that ?

I had turned my back to the old house, and stared at a building which rose from the luxuriant green at the foot of the wooded hill upon which stood the castle. Built in the form of a Greek temple, six slender Doric pillars, at the side of the steps, supported the architrave, with the pediment, and upon this the golden letters of an inscription shone in the sunlight :

APOLLINI ET MUSIS.

Anno Domini, 1670.

The theatre of the little court !

Involuntarily I glanced about me. Opposite was the respectable parsonage, gazing scornfully with its dim eyes at its frivolous neighbor, lying under its nose so ostentatiously in true antique beauty.

“A strange conglomeration,” said I to myself, and

walked toward the true object of my journey. Old, well-trodden sandstone steps led up to a massive iron-bound door; threatening dragons' heads, of artistic workmanship in bronze, formed the door knob and knocker, and over the round archway I read reverently: "Tu mihi Jova salus, quid mihi faxit homo. Anno Domini, 1605."

After I had inspected the house for some time, and thought now with sincere pleasure of my task of renovating the beautiful old building, I knew of no better way of passing the hours than to visit the castle park, which looked so green and shady, behind the iron railings. I wandered through the magnificent alleys, mounted the terraces, admired the fountains and cascades. There was not a soul in sight: everywhere the same uncanny solitude. I strolled all around the castle—stood on the round place before it, from which there was the most superb view. I gazed up at the long rows of closed windows, and crossed the solitary castle court-yard, but encountered nothing save a strong draught. A sentinel stood sleepily at his post; from the sentry-house came a loud yawn.

"Perhaps some one will turn me out of here," I thought, secretly hoping to find a living being who would at least address me, however roughly. In vain. I might enter through the open portal and wander through all the rooms; at most, I would meet but a ghost.

And suddenly I really did find myself inside, and mounted the broad, carpeted stairs. Folding doors just in front of me were open, and allowed free entrance to a drawing-room whose walls were almost completely covered with portraits. Cleaning seemed to be going on here, for brooms and cloths lay on the floor, and the blinds of one of the windows were thrown open. I merely noticed these things casually, for near the entrance my attention was enchained by the magnificently executed portrait of a

lady in the splendor fashionable about the middle of the seventeenth century. From the crimson velvet of the gown rose a beautiful white throat, upon which was set a delicate head covered with brown curls, and turned coquettishly slightly to one side. The small face, with a pair of romantic blue eyes under dark brows, was indescribably attractive, but the short, delicate nose and almost too full red lips seemed scarcely in keeping with the dreamy expression of the eyes. Yet the face was enchanting in its beauty. "Louise Charlotte, Princess of Z.," I read on the frame. "She died unmarried, in the eighty-fifth year of her life," had been added.

I did not venture to continue my investigations further, but, as I left the room, turned to glance once more at the beautiful face, whose thoughtful eyes seemed to follow me; and as I went down the steps, I meditated upon what could have been the reason that this charming princess remained a spinster. And as I had nothing to do, and my imagination had been excited by the ghostly, solitary castle, I thought of romances, in which, of course, the beautiful Louise Charlotte was always the innocent sufferer.

I reached the court-yard unseen, and sought out a charming arbor; boldly raised the silken cord of the colors of the country, which seemed to forbid admittance, and seated myself upon a comfortable bench, charmed by the beautiful mountain landscape which lay before me, bathed in the light of a late afternoon sun. I imagined this castle as it was two hundred years ago, at a time when the princess lived, and the little theatre below was just built. I remembered that the princely family is still proud of the fact that it was the first to encourage dramatic art in Germany. In spirit, I saw a venerable court chaplain at the window of his house, watching the people streaming into the temple in sinful foolishness and longing for

amusement, and I thought I heard his sigh. Who knows, perhaps the beautiful princess was a patron of comedy? I began another romance in which she secretly loved an actor, and remained unmarried for this reason. And in adding further incidents to this tale my fatigue overcame me, and I fell asleep on the princely seat in the forbidden arbor.

The castle clock struck six when I awoke, and the unknown Dorchen was to wait upon me at four! Twilight was already descending upon the mountains, the wind had risen, and black clouds lay in the west, tinged with a dazzling radiance by the setting sun. I hurried through the winding walks down the hill, past the theatre, and soon stood, breathing heavily, before the door of the old chaplain's house. It was ajar, a huge key was in the lock on the outside; so some one was waiting for me.

A loud creak accompanied the opening of the heavy door, and a broad hall lay before me whose corners were already dark. I closed the door behind me and waited for Dorchen; there was not a sound in the whole house.

"Is everything bewitched and under a spell here?" I thought angrily, and opened and closed the creaking door violently several times. It made a great noise, which was echoed by the walls, but nothing stirred.

I had time enough to take a thorough observation of my surroundings: the ceiling was supported by massive dark rafters; round-arched doors, with several steps leading up to them, broke the walls in various places; there was a broad staircase with carved iron banisters, and at the right and left two round doorways, probably leading to the kitchens or garden. The walls, once whitewashed, were adorned with life-size portraits in oils, framed in black wooden frames, but so covered with dust and cobwebs and blackened with age that I could scarcely distinguish the por-

trait of a clergyman of long-forgotten times. I stared at it for a moment, forgetting my waiting in its inspection.

“Old fossil !” I said aloud ; “and probably that is why he is left here.”

And once more, after listening to see whether some one were not finally coming, I was about to go, so that I might not run the risk of being locked in, when I heard a soft, shuffling footstep, and in a moment the bent form of a little old woman appeared on the staircase leading from the upper story—a quaint figure in an old-fashioned lawn cap, with spectacles pushed up on her forehead. She carried a long white stocking, upon which she had been knitting, in her knotty hands, and she now pushed it under her arm, while with trembling fingers she loosened a bunch of keys hanging at her side. Could this be Dorchen ? I had formed a very different idea of her.

However, at least she would unlock the house. Without saying a word, she went up-stairs again, and I followed her up the creaking stairs, across a marble-paved floor. She paused before an oaken door, black with age, and opened it. I entered an almost empty room, in which was only a hideous green porcelain stove, a table covered with papers, and a chair.

“Has this house been long unoccupied ?” I asked my silent guide.

A silent nod was my answer ; but she drew up the chair as though inviting me to take a seat.

“What are these papers ?” I asked.

“An old plan of the house,” she replied, “which His Highness had made years ago when he thought of rebuilding.”

“Oh, indeed ! It is well that it has been preserved ; it will save me work. Is the house completely empty ?” I continued my inquiries. “No more furniture or hangings ?”

“Some old rubbish, sir, and what is in the cupboards ; nothing else.”

She coughed, and then continued :

“A while ago Dorchen found a pile of old papers in this room, there in the cupboard by the stove. She tied them together and put them back. We discovered the cupboard accidentally ; it was covered with tapestry, and may have been unopened for a long time, for the papers have become yellow and are worm-eaten. They are so mouldy that they are almost in pieces.”

I listened silently. The old woman's voice was very monotonous ; it had grown almost dark, and the close air was very oppressive.

“I cannot go over the house this evening,” I said then.

“Yes, the gentleman was not very punctual. Whose fault is it ?” replied the old woman, rather reproachfully.

“Dorchen sat here in vain for two hours. Then she rummaged about. She says it was not tiresome waiting, for she read the old papers. But she had to get supper, so she has gone. She knows better about the house than I do ; I can tell you nothing.”

I stood there absorbed in thought, vexed that the day was lost. I had promised the Princess to write her at once my first impressions. I would have so gladly begun an account during the long autumn evening, and what could I do now ? Sleep ! My nap had refreshed me. Drink punch ! I was not in the mood. But I must do something——

Then a thought occurred to me.

“Could I have a light, some supper, and fire here ?” I asked. “I should like to do some work.”

The old woman was vexedly silent.

“I will ask Dorchen,” she murmured, and slowly shuffled to the door.

After a while the door creaked loudly, and in the dim twilight I saw the woman tottering over the square ; the wind blew her clothes about her, and the first drops of rain beat against the window-panes.

I stood for a long time gazing over at the castle and the little theatre. I felt strangely in the desolate old house, around which the wind now howled so loudly, and in the uncanny twilight about me. How many scenes of human joy and misery these old walls might have witnessed, how many children may have been born here, how many men carried out ; and all had met the common fate—joy and misery, disappointment after disappointment. What one might learn, could these old walls but speak !

An hour might have elapsed, when the old knocker rattled again ; it sounded much more brisk than before ; then a woman's light step hurried up the stairs and approached my door ; with a pleasant "Good-evening !" the door was opened, and a young girl appeared on the threshold, in her hand a lantern, whose light fell upon her fresh face. On her arm she carried a basket, from which protruded invitingly the neck of a bottle. Without saying much, she went quickly to work to make the room comfortable : first, the stove, in whose wide cavern the logs were soon crackling briskly ; then, in an instant, a table was brought from an adjoining room. The dust, which was inch thick upon it, was wiped away, a dazzlingly white cloth was spread over it, and cold cakes and wine were set out appetizingly. A huge arm-chair with worn covering soon stood before it ; the blinds were closed, the lamp lighted, and the room looked as cosey as an empty room possibly can.

When the pretty girl had finished her task, she paused and gazed at me with a smile.

"It is strange, Mr. Architect," she began ; "it is so cosey

in the evenings in the sitting-room at my uncle's, the keeper of the 'Deer;' they have fine beer, and fish from the castle pond—delicate carp; all the officials are there, even the chief forester and the bailiff; and you sit in the old ghostly house and wish to study, as grandmother says."

"I think you, too, have done that to-day, Miss Dorchen. You even made a discovery, did you not?"

She nodded.

"Yes, indeed; but you would not care for that: a woman wrote it; her name was Christiana, and she lived here in this house, and was the pastor's daughter. I learned that much. There are the papers."

With difficulty she opened a small cupboard set in the wall; a cloud of dust flew out, and yellow dust covered her little black apron. She laid several yellow sheets before me, tied with a faded ribbon.

"Perhaps you will read it through, sir. If it is interesting, you can tell me. Good-night. The door can stay open, there is nothing here to steal. Grandpapa may be back from the christening at any moment," she added, "and I want to be home then."

I heard her hurry down the stairs, and the door creak; then I was alone. I ate my supper absently, for my eyes rested as though charmed upon the old papers; then I drew the moth-eaten arm-chair up to the stove, and the table with the papers beside it, and prepared to look at the plans, but almost mechanically I reached over them for the yellow packet, and, beginning to read, I forgot everything else in its contents.

Outside, the wind rattled the shutters, which sighed and groaned mysteriously all over the lonely old house; but it soon was no longer lonely to me, for those who had once lived here again wandered through the rooms, alive and real.

And here, as later I wrote it down from the tattered sheets, for my little *fiancée* to read at Christmas, is a portion of a human life, in long-forgotten times :

“ Tu mihi Jova salus,
Quid mihi faxit homo,”

“ stands written over the door of this house in which I was born and have lived until now, and which I will only leave when I am carried out a dead woman. I know that when I am dead my mouth will wear a smile, for my longing will then be satisfied.

“ That is a beautiful proverb, and yet it was a long time before I understood it, for I have been bitterly wronged, so bitterly and so deeply that my heart did not even wish to hear of God, since He permitted me to be treated thus.

“ Much sorrow and great trials fell to my lot ; trials which bound me with heavy chains for years, and when my lot became easier, and my sad heart turned again to Him who watches over all fates, I saw in my mirror a sunken face and gray hairs. It is so with many. Youth violently and defiantly opposes misfortune ; then gradually strength gives way, mildness and humility return after their long absence, and finally we fold our hands thankfully, and say : ‘ If Thou art for me, who can be against me ? ’

“ Therefore I can write down, in all calmness, what for so long a time was a burning torment to me. I should like all those whom in my misery I have pained, and yet who had many a kind word for the hard, solitary woman who walked past them as a stranger, to read it. May they be rewarded for their kindness, both in this world and the next. And so then, in God’s name, I begin :

“ *Anno Domini*, 1699.

“ It was nearly fifty years ago that my cradle was rocked here in this very same room. It was on a Sunday

in August. Sunday children are said to be very fortunate. And I was often enough told of this. Cousin Wieschen even said that a Sunday child, such as I, born to the sound of church bells, knew many things such as ordinary beings could not understand—the song of birds, for instance: but her prophecy has never come true; there are exceptions to every rule.

“I know little of my early childhood, only that our house was a very quiet one; for the court chaplain, my father, was a thin, gloomy man, whose grave mouth I never saw smile. He always sat in his study absorbed in his books, if his clerical duties did not demand his presence in church or school; and I remember well the many quiet hours in the great sitting-room at the left-hand side of the hall, with the heavy oak table between the windows, the gay porcelain stove, the small lounge on the plaster floor covered with crackling sand. In the deep window my mother sat spinning or sewing, and I at her feet, thread tied in my needle, and a bright bit of cloth in my childish hands, eagerly imitating her, while Cousin Wieschen, an old woman, a relation of my mother, who had found shelter in our house, told me amusing or terrible fairy stories.

“The old woman’s lips became silent as soon as my father entered the room; he called her a superstitious woman who sinned deeply, and would hardly go to heaven did she persist in her unbelief. The old woman would bow her head at this, but raise it all the more triumphantly when the stern man left the room.

“‘And it is true,’ she asserted boldly, ‘there is a wild huntsman, and there are witches and gnomes up in the woods whose existence even highly learned clergymen cannot mock at, although they fight against them with blessings and curses, Cross and the Bible; and if I only had a charm, they could not hurt this house.’

“At the time of the summer vacation the house and garden were gay. Then one evening with the sunset arrived two slender young fellows, heated and dusty, but their faces radiant, and mother stood at the door, and her face, usually so grave, smiled a welcome to them. But from the kitchen came the odor of my brothers’ favorite cake.

“Ah, that was a delight for me, who usually was so wholly without all youthful enjoyments. When the sons had been rigidly examined by their stern father, when the mother’s eyes had gazed at them sufficiently, and she was now absorbed in mending their torn clothes, and making new ones, then we went out into the shady garden, into the green forest, so far that no one met us, and only an occasional deer would break through the thicket, or a vulture call high up in the sky above us. I never need dread a long walk; when my feet were weary my brothers would pick me up and carry me on their crossed arms. ‘Carrying an angel,’ we called it; and there I sat between them, a green wreath on my blonde braids, a bouquet of wild flowers in my hand, like a princess in her sedan-chair, and the young faces smiled at me from each side.

“A handsome pair, in truth, slender as pine-trees, and supple as the birches which grew in our forests, between the beeches of all kinds—both brave, both dear to me, but Conrad was always the handsomest, best, and bravest. Although he was much quieter and did not tease me so much, although his laugh was not so merry, yet one word from his mouth made me happier than the tenderest pet names with which Walter overwhelmed his little sister.

“My favorite spot was the princely pleasure garden. I could lie there for hours in some secluded nook, and gaze through the thick foliage at the castle, which seemed to look past me arrogantly with its proud rows of windows. All that had happened, or would happen, as my childish

imagination depicted to me, interested me greatly; and when my father came back from the castle, where he went twice each week, I never left his room until I had heard whether he had seen Princess Liselotte.

“Princess Liselotte! How often I dreamed of her, how often I watched behind the bushes of the castle hill only to see her drive quickly past. Then I would press my hands together, and hold my breath with delight: there could never be anything more beautiful in my eyes than the round, rosy face under the brown curls which clustered charmingly around the delicate head and were arranged in the latest fashion, *à la paysanne*; the brilliant dark blue eyes, and the full little mouth, always wearing such a happy smile. Oh, I can see her so plainly to-day, in her pink silk stomacher, cut low and showing her white neck, and fitting the slender body so tightly. I can still see the glittering spangles, and fancy I hear the velvet train rustling behind Princess Liselotte.

“Each time that her carriage rolled past our house the silk curtains were slightly raised, and her eyes sought our window; my mother would then rise and make a reverential courtesy, which was usually acknowledged by a charming wave of the small hand, in its gold-embroidered glove. Oh, Princess Liselotte was always favorably disposed to our house, and she was Conrad's godmother, and each year sent him ten bright Mansfeld thalers for his savings box, while His Serene Highness, the Princess' brother, had promised him a handsome stipend, and that, after father retired, he should be court chaplain.

“Often my mother said to me, when the Princess' coach rolled through the iron gateway of the castle park: ‘Go to the doorway, Christiana, and render a courtesy; Princess Liselotte is coming.’ And then I would stand on the steps, my childish heart beating rapidly, and see

the beautiful woman's head lean forward. And yet, sometimes, it seemed to me that the smile left her lips when she gazed at our house.

"Princess Liselotte remained unmarried. 'She refuses all suitors,' declared Cousin Wieschen. Cousin Wieschen also said that she was arrogant and frivolous. I did not like to hear that, and I began to cry.

" 'What do you care about the stupid Princess?' Walter used to say ; but Conrad took me by the hand, and we wandered in the castle park, and while I thought of all sorts of things, he rested his pale, noble face upon his hands, and read until, in the twilight, he could no longer distinguish the letters.

"The Sundays of my childhood shine in my remembrance like golden stars. How solemn it was, even at awakening ; how festive the frock of green wool, in which Cousin Wieschen dressed me, seemed. The whole house smelled delightfully of pine, which we had brought from the forest the day before, and which, broken into small bits, lay on the white sanded floor. We scarcely spoke at breakfast, which on this day father did not share with us. At the first sound of the bells, he would come out of his room, clad all in black, and would walk with measured tread to the castle ; for at that time service was held in the chapel which lay within the princely apartments, and from which one passed directly into the great banquet-hall. When the bells rang for the third time we followed to church ; but on my prayer book I always found a fresh bouquet, usually of red and variegated pinks, whose aromatic perfume I preferred to that of all other flowers.

"Conrad did that ; and then I would take his hand, and we would walk together, mother with Walter, who wore a twig of oak in his cap.

"I did not understand much of father's sermons, and

remember but one of them—that on the day when Conrad and Walter were confirmed. All the rest were like empty words in my ears, for I always saw but one person in the church—Princess Liselotte. Often, at our Sunday suppers, when father asked us the text of his sermon, to see whether the seed he had sown had fallen on good ground, I could make no answer, and he would say angrily: ‘Dreamer, where were your thoughts in God’s house?’

“But it was often the same with Conrad, and that was even worse, as he was destined to become a clergyman. And it was so one particular Sunday. At that time he was sixteen years old, and thought of leaving the gymnasium that autumn, so as to begin his theological studies in Helmstadt.

“It was after communion, and a rain-storm kept us in the house; only Walter had gone over to the forester’s to play with the dogs, and listen to the forester’s boys’ tales of strange adventures. In the twilight I stood by the window and gazed over at the castle, where one light after another shone out, but Conrad leaned against the deep framework opposite me, and gazed dreamily out at the storm. Mother was busy in another room.

“‘What do you think, Conrad?’ suddenly asked father’s voice close beside us, so that we started in alarm. ‘What do you think of the explanation of the Lord’s prayer which I gave to-day in my sermon? It is written, “Lead us not into temptation.” Our Lord endured this triumphantly, but can it be reckoned such a great sin in a weak man if he is not so firm when he is tempted and dazzled by hellish powers?’

“His pale young face flushed crimson, and he was silent for a moment.

“‘I should not venture to decide,’ he then answered.

“‘Because you are too lazy to think over the matter!’

burst out my father angrily, 'or else you would be forced to say : "With our own strength alone we cannot resist such temptation; only if God graciously sends us help can we do so."' Father had spoken with unusual violence. He continued : 'You should devote your attention more to such subjects. What are you thinking of? What foolish ideas is your mind running upon? Is it proper for a future theological student to write verses which, in color and passion, vie with those you read in Ovid?'

"And he angrily held a piece of paper before his son's eyes ; but with one spring the latter had left the window, and fell on his knees before his father :

" 'I beg you,' he cried, fairly beside himself, 'let me choose another profession more suited to my nature.'

"The grave man made no answer ; the room was strangely quiet ; only the rain beat against the windows, and the wind shook the shutters.

" 'Leave the room, Christiana,' commanded my father ; so I went, and seated myself in the kitchen with folded hands, for I suspected vaguely that the happiness or wretchedness of a human life was to be decided in there. Cousin Wieschen sat and slept, and a cricket chirped on the hearth ; then mother crossed the sanded floor with a light step, the door closed, and it was quite still for a long time.

"Then faltering steps crossed the hall ; they were Conrad's. I rose to follow him ; but I heard mother whisper :

" 'Conrad ! Conrad ! Let me speak to you, my darling child. Have we not always cared for you as faithful parents?'

"But he rushed up-stairs ; mother hurried after him. A door closed up-stairs, and with anxious heart I crept into my little room, which I shared with Cousin Wieschen, and there I lay, and could not sleep.

“The old cousin had long been asleep, when I heard steps on the porch of the house. I threw my red cloak over me and crept out ; there I saw Conrad in the dim light, which the moon gave in spite of the clouds. He sat on the top step, his face buried in his hands. I ran to him and threw my arms around his neck. ‘Conrad, why do you cry?’ Then he raised his face ; it looked rigid as that of a corpse. I crouched beside him and caressed him, and accidentally touched his travelling valise, which, together with his staff, lay beside him.

“‘What are you going to do, dear, darling Conrad?’ I asked, in alarm.

“‘I do not know, Christiana ; my head is so hot. I would rather go away and never come back ; but, best of all, I would like to die.’

“‘But do you not love mother?’ I asked, in the greatest alarm. Then he started as though bitten by a serpent, and began to weep bitterly.

“So we sat silently, side by side, and finally he kissed me and said : ‘Go to bed, Christel ; you do not understand why I am crying.’ And he took me in his arms so that my bare feet should not touch the cold floor, and I kissed him again and threw my arms around him, and called him my dear, darling brother, and asked him whether he would not go to bed and stay with us. I heard him say ‘Yes,’ but it sounded very hesitating.

“The next day no one would have thought anything strange had occurred. Conrad humbly kissed our parents’ hands when he came to breakfast ; he was calm, although he had dark lines under his eyes and was very pale. The day passed quietly ; it was the last day of the vacation, and early the next morning, at the first cock-crow, the brothers walked to school once more—for the last time, since in October Conrad was to go to Helm-

stadt, but Walter was to enter our Prince's service as forester. And so they took leave of us, Walter full of smiles ; Conrad, grave and silent as ever.

"I do not know how it happened, but since that night I could think of nothing but my eldest brother ; his pale face rose again and again to my mind, and how bitterly he had wept. At times I longed to asked mother what grief tormented him, but I was silent from timidity, for she never answered inquisitive questions, and what I should know she told me voluntarily.

"And so two years passed without the occurrence of anything remarkable. Conrad came home occasionally, and he always seemed to me paler and quieter than formerly, and yet more manly and dignified. I could not look at him enough ; and when he stood before father and told him of the newest questions which the learned gentlemen of Helmstadt discussed together, speaking in a soft voice, coldly, almost indifferently, I felt sorry for him, and yet I did not know why. But his quiet manners and calmness pleased father. 'It will become him well when he stands in the chancel,' I heard him say to my mother. But after father had gone Cousin Wieschen remarked : 'Fever heat of passion leaves him like ice.'

"On the fifth of May of the following year—the day before, seventeen candles had burned on my birthday cake—misfortune came to us. My father had a stroke of paralysis which deprived him for a short time of the power of speech and paralyzed his left side, so that he could not walk or move his arm. There was great sorrow in our house. Walter hurried home, and we thought that father would surely die. But Cousin Wieschen was on hand, with her vials and boxes of powerful extracts of herbs and sal volatile ; and when the court physicians entered the sick-room father had already opened his eyes again, and they

sought my mother's face, and then the picture of the crucified Christ which hung beside his bed.

"The doctor reassured us, and said that bleeding would soon relieve him. We left the room, but when, after a while, Dr. Grundmannus came into the sitting-room, he said to my mother: 'Madam, he will not die; but he can never resume his duties, for he will be paralyzed all the rest of his life.' This made us very sad, for father was still young and strong, scarcely fifty-six years old, and would gladly have served the church for a long time yet.

"But in the afternoon came a letter from His Serene Highness, stating that a substitute should be engaged until such time as Conrad had finished his studies, so that father must not be uneasy about his congregation. And Princess Liselotte daily sent her page to inquire for father, and on the little table beside the bed stood the most tempting delicacies from the princely table. It was not many days later that Conrad wrote to me for news of father's illness. It was the first letter I had ever received from him, and I read it many times; and although I could have given no reason for doing so, I could have wept over it. 'I am very sorry for father,' he wrote, 'for it must be hard to lie there with paralyzed limbs when one would fain be out in the fresh May air, although it cannot be harder than where one's soul, which longs to soar high on its pinions, is borne down by heavy chains which—but that you will never understand, little sister, and it is better that this longing should be unknown to you.'

"It was evening when I read this letter in my little room overlooking the garden; I sat by the open window, and it touched me strangely, so that I leaned my head on my hand, and stared out at the whispering linden branches through which shone the sunset glow. What

made his heart so heavy, when he was young and should be happy? Why had he begged that day to choose some other calling than that of preaching God's word? Is it not a high and sacred office, and is not our home peaceful and beautiful, with its solid old house and quiet garden behind? Did we not all love him dearly, and was it not an honor for him to be called to take father's place when so young? 'What could it be? What could it be?' I repeated aloud, just as Cousin Wieschen noiselessly crossed the threshold.

"The old woman seated herself in the high-backed chair which I had left. I swung myself up on the broad window-seat and folded my arms. She pretended that she had not heard my question, and I said nothing more.

"'You are now seventeen years old,' she began, after a long silence—'old enough to know the thing; others of your age already have a husband and child. But you must promise to tell no one, and to act as though you did not know what I tell you, or evil will come of it. If you will do this, say twice, "Really and truly!" and give me your hand on your promise.

"'Really and truly,' I repeated.

"'Listen, there is a nightingale singing,' whispered the old woman. 'How sweet that sounds. In my youth it sounded even sweeter and more beautiful.' She paused a moment; her thoughts seemed far away. Suddenly she leaned forward and looked me directly in the eyes.

"'He is not your brother, child,' said she. 'Oh! why are you so startled? Have you never guessed that?' And then she took my hands, for I had slipped down from the window-seat and stood trembling before her, and she forced me down on the bench at her feet.

"'You need not be so horrified. Conrad is a noble fellow. What fault of his is it that his mother was a faith-

less, dishonorable woman? One could say much of such affairs, which begin with youth and beauty, with roses and nightingales, and end in remorse and heartache. Conrad's father has long been dead. God rest his soul! But his mother—his mother lives in splendor, luxury, and honor. She can still laugh as happily as at that time, and she is still beautiful, only sometimes her heart gives a throb when she has seen his pale young face. And now do not ask any questions. I will tell you myself. That is why Conrad is so sad; more passionate blood than ours flows in his veins; it rebels against the yoke forced upon him, against the hard lot awaiting him. He would like to go out into the bright, gay world, and she who bore him will never permit that. He must be your father's successor; he must not turn his eyes to the world where his mother lives. That is his grief. God grant that he may recover from it. A plant in too small a pot breaks it, or withers and dies; it is a dangerous game which is being played with the poor boy.'

"'Who is his mother, cousin?' I asked. The blood rushed to my head, and my heart beat violently.

"'Speak softly,' said the old woman. 'Are you stupid, Christiana? I thought you were a sensible girl. Who—*who* is she? I could tell you, but your father would stone me and turn me out of the house if her name crossed my lips. Wait, I will show you something; perhaps you can guess.'

"And she rose and went to the end of the room, where stood a chest with red tulips and roses painted upon it. She opened it, and knelt down before it, and, by the last ray of the setting sun, she took a little bundle out of it, and when she untied it there were little things, wonderfully fine, lace-trimmed, but yellow with age, within. My cousin laid a kerchief in my hand; it was daintily embroidered

and trimmed with Brabant lace ; in the corner a coat of arms was embroidered with gold thread, and as I inspected it more closely I recognized the springing deer which was the coat of arms of our princely family.

“ ‘ He lay in that when he was brought to your parents—fine swaddling clothes, eh ? They must have wrapped him in it in all haste. I kept it carefully, and not without intention either, you may believe, Christel : show it to him sometime later—later ; then, when he has overcome his hot youthful longing, it will be of use to him. But never tell your father, child, not for any consideration.’ ”

“ I still held the fine kerchief in my hand and stared at the gold-embroidered crest, and gradually the strangely curved letters underneath became plain. L. C., ‘ Louise Charlotte,’ flashed through my mind, and ‘ Liselotte,’ I screamed, so that it rang piercingly through the room.

“ The old woman tore the kerchief from my hands and threw it into the chest. ‘ Are you mad ? ’ she whispered. ‘ Shall your mother come, or your father ask why you screamed ? Go and sit by the window,’ and she lifted me, and forced me into the arm-chair, and took her smelling salts from her pocket and let me inhale them, as I could not control myself.

“ ‘ Oh, what is the use of being so affected ? ’ she scolded. ‘ Does the fact that his mother was a high-born lady alter the case ? It remains the same, and he is no longer your brother, but can be something else to you, far dearer and more delightful. This has long been my cherished plan. You have become a pretty girl, Christel ; your hair shines like gold, and you have a complexion like apple blossoms, and you are quiet and sensible. Be careful. It will be as I say, little lamb ; then think of me on your wedding day, if I am no longer alive.’ ”

“ And she petted me and coaxed, and I feigned calm-

ness, so that she would go. Then I bolted the door behind her, and buried my glowing face in the cushions of the arm-chair and cried, as I had never cried before in my life, so that I gasped for breath. Hours passed before I raised my head again ; it had become night, a dark, warm May night ; the air was sultry, and the nightingales sang loudly in the linden-trees. That sounded so differently from formerly, and now I could understand Conrad, but I no longer understood myself.

“A dreaminess had come over me which paralyzed my nature, formerly so fresh and active, and many a word of reproof did I receive from my mother. She also consulted the doctor, who said that I was too lonely among so many older people ; that I should seek a playmate, and laugh and be happy, as was suited to my years. But I would hear of no one, and preferred to sit quite alone under the linden in the garden, hear the nightingales sing, and think of Princess Liselotte and Conrad. And then, when the nightingales had grown silent and sat on their nests in the thicket of elder bushes, I still thought of their singing.

“One morning in July, a woman came to the house and brought a letter. It was from my father’s only sister, who was married to a forester in Harzgerode. She wrote that she was dying, and begged her brother to have pity upon her only little daughter. The woman who brought the letter also brought the news of my aunt’s death, and that the girl had thrown herself upon her dead mother’s body in despair, and there was no one to comfort her. Then Cousin Wieschen quickly got into a wagon and drove over to Harzgerode, for father still lay on his couch of pain, and mother was unwilling to leave him.

“I must make up a bed in the alcove room, and mother gave orders that I should occupy it with my young cousin,

as it was a large room. But I refused to leave my room, before the window of which grew the linden-tree, and I did not want to have a view of the castle. And as I began to cry, mother let me have my way, and Cousin Wieschen's bed was carried into the large room : that pleased me very well.

"Toward evening of the same day I went into the garden with my sewing, and seated myself in the beech arbor. No one was there : a deaf old woman was weeding the beds of young beets and onions, far behind ; but I laid my work in my lap, and, absorbed in my thoughts, I forgot to make the black crape bonnet which my mother wished to wear to church next day in honor of her sister-in-law.

"It had been a warm day, the gnats danced in the rays of the setting sun, and the pale young moon already soared in the heavens. From the forest came a pungent odor of pine, and on the other side of the hedge a woman was singing an old song with a monotonous melody.

"Twilight softly advanced, and finally it became quiet around me. Then I plainly heard my name called through the silence of the evening : 'Christel ! Christel !' not loudly, but yet not softly, and it sounded like Conrad's voice, so that I started in alarm, and thought it was a ghost, and shuddered for fear that some misfortune had befallen him. I listened with all my senses on the alert, and heard once more : 'Christel, Christel ; little sister, open the gate !' I hurried out of the arbor, and there he stood before the gate leading out to the high-road, and his face was as pale as that of a corpse.

"'I cannot jump over as I used to,' said he. And now, for the first time, I noticed the white cloth bound over his forehead, and I hurried to open the gate, and drew him into the garden.

“ ‘Conrad, what have you done? Where do you come from?’

“But he was so weak that he could scarcely stand, and leaned heavily upon me as I led him to the arbor. After he had rested for a little while, he asked for wine, but I was not to tell them in the house that he was here until he had told me all. I came back with a cupful for him without having been seen, and when he had drunk it his face became hot and glowing, yet he shook as though with a chill, so that I said imploringly:

“ ‘Conrad, come and lie down; you are ill.’

“He confessed, hesitatingly, that he had been wounded in a duel, and, as though his thoughts wandered, he laid his hand frequently upon his forehead, and said he felt sick—sick unto death. But father must never hear of it, so he would wait here until it grew quite dark. Then I seated myself beside him in great terror, and laid my hand on his forehead; it burned like fire, and his head sank heavily upon my shoulder. And thus we sat until gradually the stars came out, and my mother’s voice rang out through the quiet garden:

“ ‘Christiana, are you dreaming again?’

“ ‘Come!’ I said to him. And with a faint groan he rose and staggered to the house. We came up the steps unnoticed, and, as no bed was in readiness for him, I took him to my own little room, and there he sank upon the bed, while his limbs shook as though with cold. Then I hurried to mother and told her. She grew white to the lips, and ordered me to stay with father. And she hurried out, and while I sat by father’s sick-bed and talked to him, my thoughts were up-stairs, with Conrad—my darling brother, whom I yet could no longer think of as a brother.

“Then I heard the house-door open softly, and when I went to the window, and gazed out, I saw our maid run-

ning across the square to the house of the court physician, and soon she came back with him. My father said, vexedly, that there was a great running to and fro for Saturday evening, and that it was not proper in a clergyman's house, and told me to go and see what it was all about.

"I hurried out of the room and ran breathlessly up-stairs. Then I heard the doctor say :

" 'Madam, he is very ill, but say nothing about it to your husband ; he must be spared all irritation.' "

"My mother began to lament that her cousin was not home, and who was there to take care of him, since she could not leave father ?

"Then I came softly in and said that I would take care of him, and seated myself beside his bed. He lay there, his cheeks flushed with fever, his blue eyes shining strangely, and he talked continually. Now he quarrelled with some one, and abused him—then he cried out :

" 'My mother, mother ! I do not want her ; leave me my dear old mother. It is not true, what you tell me ! ' And then he began to sing a college song.

"I stared down at him in horror.

" 'Conrad,' I whispered ; 'darling brother.'

"Then he was quiet for a moment.

" 'Christel, Christel, my little blonde sister, you have become so dainty and pretty. Ah, if you knew what has befallen me, how they mocked and pained me, those men. Can I help it that my mother——' He laughed bitterly. 'But, my boy, you have fared badly, worse than I. One, two, three, attack ! ' And he sat up in bed wildly, and it was only owing to his aching head that he sank back upon the pillows again with a groan.

"All that man could do for him was done ; the doctor came again twice that night, and told me how to put the cooling cloths on his head, and give him the sour drink.

And toward morning he gradually became calmer, and fell asleep. Then my head also sank back against the back of the chair, and I fell asleep, but started up in the gray dawn, for the room was deathly still. I could scarcely hear him breathing, but as I bent over him he groaned, as faintly as though he were in great pain.

“‘Conrad,’ said I, ‘are you suffering much?’

“‘It burns,’ said he; ‘my head burns like the flames of hell, but my heart pains even worse.’

“And as he opened his eyes I saw that he was conscious, and knelt down beside his bed.

“‘Conrad,’ said I, ‘what makes your heart so heavy?’

“He threw his arm around my neck, and drew my face down to his.

“‘Christiana,’ he whispered, ‘we have always loved each other dearly: help me to bear up; help me not to succumb to the struggles and unrest of my heart. Stay with me, Christel; you are good and kind, and I do not know what will become of me.’

“‘You will yet be happy, Conrad,’ said I, consolingly; ‘you will get well, and will live here with us in peace and love as in the old times when we were children. Do not despair, Conrad; think of the proverb over our door, which you once translated into German for me: “If God is with me, who can be against me?”’

“‘Do you think so?’ said he scornfully.

“‘Conrad!’ I cried, ‘God forgive you your sinful words.’

“He drew away his arm and turned his head away from me, so that his face was toward the wall.

“‘I see very well that no one can understand me, not even you—how should you?’ said he bitterly. And he would say nothing more, however I pleaded, and refused to eat or drink; but his breath came quicker, and toward

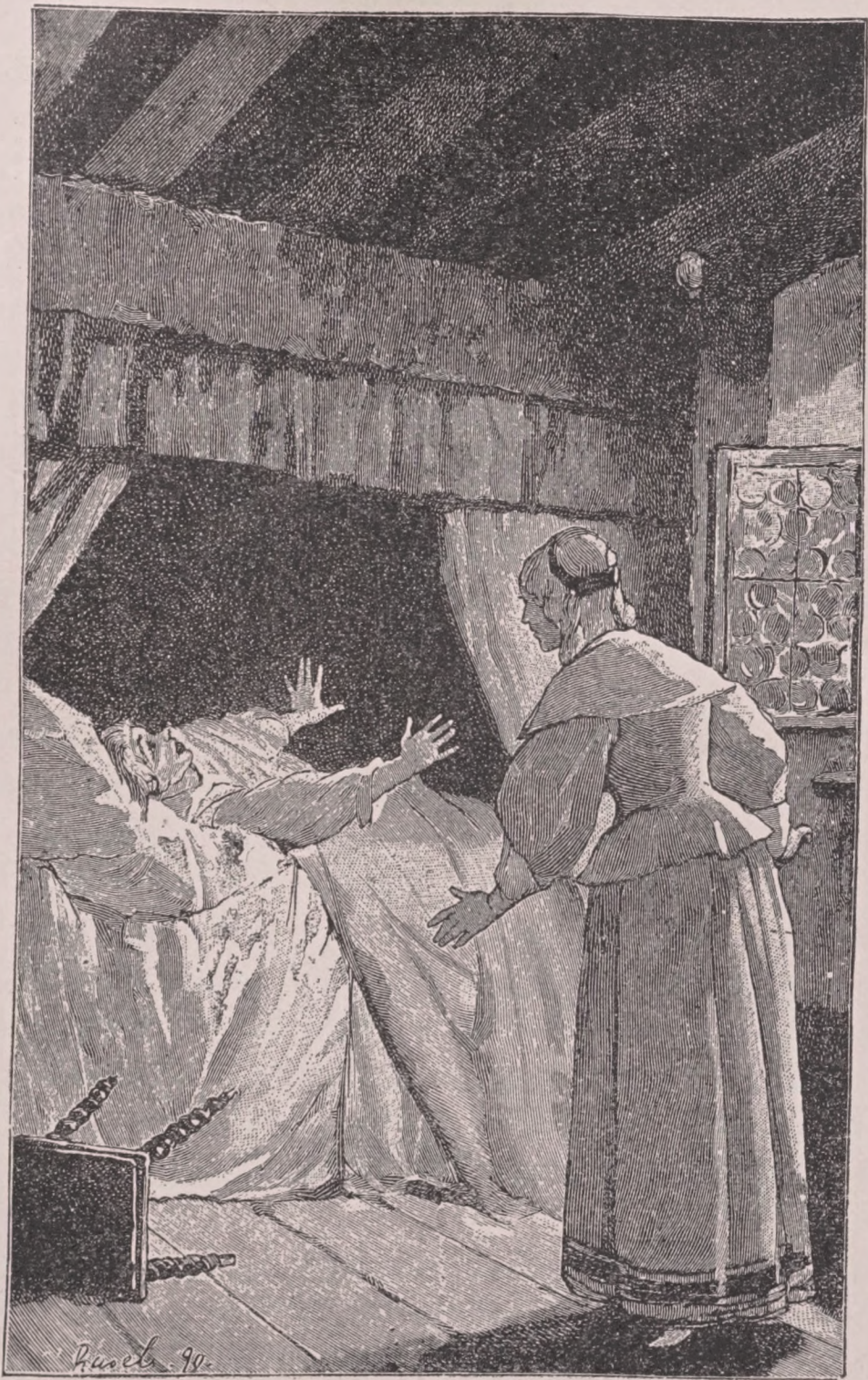
evening he became delirious again. But the doctor said he would become even more violent, and also that there was little hope if the fever did not soon subside.

“There was great mourning in our house, and Cousin Wieschen, who returned at dusk with my young cousin, wrung her hands and moaned that he would die, for she saw the death-bird as she drove through the castle park. But father learned of it, for Cousin Wieschen told him, and said that he lay quite still and did not say a word. I felt sorrowful and oppressed, and nevertheless my heart had become peaceful, and when they wished to send me away from his bedside I refused violently—it seemed to me that I belonged to him for all eternity, and that I must never leave him.

“The fever increased steadily. Cousin Wieschen watched beside the sick-bed with true anxiety, and I thought of Princess Liselotte, and wondered whether she would not feel for him who suffered so. But no one was at home at the castle to think of him, only from the tower floated the red and white banner, the silent sign of rejoicing; for His Serene Highness had at last yielded to the petitions of his people, and had chosen a wife for himself, and Princess Liselotte had gone with him to the betrothal, and many entertainments and festivities detained them at the court of his future wife’s father, who was a French duke, and closely related to the reigning family.

“And in the dark sick-room lay one who—I did not dare even to think of it, and glanced shyly at the face glowing with fever as it rested upon the pillows. Just then he started up; he sat upright in bed, and stretched out his hand as though some one stood at the foot of the bed, and cried in a loud voice which went to my heart :

“‘I swear it to you by my wounds, by all that is holy to me on earth, by my mother’s honor——’



“Then his eager face changed, and in a cutting tone he cried :

“‘I have no mother ! What do you want ? Go ! I will revenge myself. Oh, my blighted life ! Would that I were dead !’

“I grasped his hand, but Cousin Wieschen stared in horror at the boy, now lying there exhausted.

“‘The sins of the father —’ she began, and dried his damp forehead, and listened to his faint, hurried whispering, which I did not understand, and which rose again to a delirious scream, echoing fearfully through the quiet room. Cousin Wieschen opened a window, so that the cool air might blow into the close room ; the last rays of the setting sun filled it with a golden radiance, and a woman’s voice floated up to us, deep and full and sweet, so that I listened in wonder.

“Then cousin said that was father’s young niece, who seemed to mourn but little for her dead mother. And she leaned out of the window and called softly :

“‘Hedwig, stop singing ; you will disturb Conrad.’

“Then the voice called :

“‘Oh, no, cousin ; quite the reverse. My dear mother always grew calmer the more I sang.’ And she at once began again the old folk-song of the young cavalryman who has no home ; and Conrad became calmer, as though the sweet tones soothed his heated brain. But when she had finished he began to rave again, more violently than before.

“‘Let her go on singing, cousin,’ said I. But it was hard for me to ask this. What would not I have given to be able to sing like that now, so sweetly and so beautifully ? I had never known my aunt : my father and his sister were not congenial. Her husband was said to have been a wild fellow who understood all kinds of magic, never failed to

accomplish his purpose, and had killed many a poacher. Whether this were true I could not say, but my father had little love for him, because he scarcely opened his lips without an oath ; and as he had once violently reprov'd him for this, the ties between the brothers-in-law had been broken, and my aunt never sent a fine piece of venison or other game to our house again. Until the hour of her death, she seemed to have forgotten her brother.

“Cousin rose at my request, and peered down into the garden.

“‘Hedwig, Hedwig!’ she cried softly, but there was no sound. ‘She has gone farther down in the garden,’ she said. ‘Will you not look for her, Christel? I am tired and my back aches ; you have young feet ; I will take your place here.’

“I went down-stairs and looked down the dark paths, but did not find her. I was about to go back to the house, thinking she had gone in, when I discovered her in the linden under my window ; she had climbed up to the lowest branch from the bench underneath, and there she sat amid the green leaves, while the sunlight played on her brown hair and charmed golden lights from it. Her arms were folded ; the slipper had fallen from one of her feet, and lay on the ground, as small as a child’s.

“‘Hedwig!’ I called softly ; then she looked down, and when she saw me, she slipped down from her airy perch and stood before me. A wonderfully dainty figure, graceful as the deer in our woods, and her light brown eyes, under their long dark lashes, as large and shy as theirs ! Her mouth had a gloomy look, which told of solitude and silent self-will. But the delicate nostrils quivered as did Conrad’s sometimes, and Cousin Wieschen had told me that this was a sign of violent passions and a sensitive nature.

“I held out my hand : ‘ How do you do, Hedwig ? You come to our house at a sad time ; do not be vexed if I cannot be with you as much as hospitality demands. It will be different after a time, I hope. But I have come to ask you to sing another song, for it does Conrad good.’

“She had lowered her eyes, and without those bright stars her face seemed almost plain. But she was ready to follow me at once, and followed me up the stairs so softly that twice I looked around thinking that she was no longer behind me. And so she went up to Conrad’s bed and bent over him, and then she seated herself in my place and began to sing softly ; and Conrad lay still, and Cousin Wieschen fell asleep in the arm-chair by the window. I had seated myself upon the chest which held Princess Liselotte’s kerchief, and stared before me in the twilight, my eyes burning, and listened to the song. A gloomy, angry mood came over me, and I felt as though I must push the girl away from the bed, and send her away from the house so that she would never return.

“And she sang on calmly and softly, sadly and sweetly, the song of a hunter who lay buried in the forest—of Knight Ewald, and his Lina, who died of grief when he rode away and left her. Sometimes a bright note rang out, as sunlight pierces the dark fir branches, but then the song became sad and mournful again. I knew all the songs ; they were sung all over our part of the country, yet that day they sent burning tears to my eyes.

“Conrad lay on his bed for weeks ; sometimes conscious, but chiefly in a dull stupor. Hedwig sat beside his bed for hours, patiently and unweariedly, and the mere sound of her voice seemed to calm him. And outside, the trees gradually took on their autumn tints, and gay life had returned to the castle : the sound of hunting horns and the baying of dogs came even to our quiet house ; but

Princess Liselotte looked more lovely than ever on her bright brown horse when she rode into the forest, the foreign cavaliers, in their red hunting-coats, at her side.

“Whether her blue eyes, looking out so merrily from beneath her feather-trimmed hat, ever glanced toward our house, whether she suspected that he was ill, I do not know, for I turned from the window as she passed, and went to Conrad’s quiet little room, where no sound from outside penetrated. But I must now often be with father : he was preparing a wedding address for His Highness — and as it was hard for him to write, I sat beside his chair and he dictated the words to me.

“Those were hard hours, for my heart was up-stairs ; and when Conrad raved loudly, I laid down my pen and sprang to the door. Then father, vexed at being disturbed, would say crossly : ‘Why are you so worried ? Is not Hedwig with him, and do not your mother and cousin go in and out to give him his medicine ?’ And I would bow my head in hot, bitter shame, and yet I could not overcome my anxiety.

“Gradually he grew better, and mother fitted up another room for him—larger and more comfortable, and the gardener carried him in there, for he was too weak to walk. A chest of books had come from Helmstadt, and I was told to unpack it and place them on the table beside his bed, and he smiled for the first time when he saw them.

“Hedwig and I could never become intimate ; she was of a shy, indolent nature—was fond neither of spinning nor housekeeping ; and sometimes, when on warm autumn days the golden sunlight rested on the crimson and yellow leaves of the forest, she disappeared for hours, and only came home at evening, while a yellow leaf or moss caught in her hair betrayed that she had been lying under a tree in the forest dreaming. Sometimes her shyness left

her, and on long, rainy October evenings, when we sat in Conrad's room, the lamp not yet lighted, and only the fire shedding a flickering light in the room, she would tell us old, long-forgotten stories of war times, when Tilly marched over the Harz Mountains; how he lived up in the mountains, and how the forester in Harzgerode saved himself by shooting enchanted guns blindly out of the window, and that each shot killed an enemy. But the balls were enchanted and never missed their aim; and when they were moulded, some sawdust must be taken from the heart of an oak that had been struck by lightning, and it must be at midnight in one of the twelve nights between Christmas and the night of the Three Kings. She told this in such an animated way, and could change her voice so suddenly, that one almost fancied he heard the cry of a terrified woman, the groan of some man hit by one of the magic balls, or the broken-hearted sobs of a girl taking leave of her lover about to go to battle. She would interweave a song with her tale—sad, as she preferred, and as seemed best suited to the young lips under the shy eyes—and she made charming gestures as she talked. But Conrad listened no less reverently than I, and once when Walter, who had come to inquire after his brother's health, laughed loudly at magic balls and such nonsense, he cried violently: 'Let her go on with her story, Walter, and be glad that you need no magic balls, but can hit your mark without them.'

"Father and mother were less charmed with the new inmate of our house, and father said her head was full of romance and nonsense, and she would never become a sensible woman. But she cared little that she was blamed: she stood patiently with bowed head, her curly brown hair shading her forehead in soft waves, and listened indifferently to the longest lecture; for a while she would

sit at the spinning-wheel, or help the maid in the kitchen, but soon she was her old self again.

“It was toward the end of October that Conrad walked across his room for the first time, and paused at the window.

“‘Oh, what are they building over there?’ he asked, and pointed to a strange-looking building which rose opposite just where the slope of the castle hill began.

“We were standing side by side, and I told him that I did not know. I had really not had sufficient curiosity to ask, in my anxiety about him.

“‘What will you give me, Conrad, if I tell you?’ asked Hedwig, jokingly, dropping her needle.

“He turned with a smile. ‘What do you want, Hedwig?’ he asked, teasingly.

“‘I should like to know what little book that is in which you read so eagerly. See, it is no clerical book, for the letters are not like ours.’ And she pointed to an open book in his hand.

“He flushed crimson. ‘One piece of information for another,’ said he, jokingly. ‘What are they building over there?’

“‘What are you reading here?’ she laughed. And so a merry quarrel ensued between them, as neither would betray the secret first. Then he yielded.

“‘A Greek poet’s comedies,’ said he. Then she began to laugh, her silvery laugh which echoed from the walls, and Cousin Wieschen opened the door to see what had happened.

“‘See, Conrad, what a strange coincidence! They are building a house over there in which the Greek poet’s comedies are to be acted.’

“Conrad did not join in her laugh; he turned to the window again, and gazed out at the workmen who were

lifting a block of marble from the wagon which had brought it from Rübeland. The room had grown quiet. Hedwig, too, was silent.

“ ‘Who told you that, Hedwig?’ asked Conrad, finally.

“ ‘The Prince’s valet’s wife,’ said she, and her tongue ran like a mill wheel. ‘I can tell you all about it, as she told it to me, for I was with her an hour yesterday evening. You see, our Prince’s future wife comes from a gay French court. There they often act comedies, and the young princess has no amusement of which she is more fond. She calls it a high art to be able to imitate people as though they were living and real. The Prince is building this house in her honor, and he has engaged a company of actors for a large sum. The woman said that he had even sent his valet to Dresden, where the best actors were trained, and he had summoned an architect from there. You know the Prince of Saxony built a theatre, years ago, after the same pattern by which they are building this; it will be magnificent.’

“Conrad made no reply: he began to walk up and down the room in deep thought. After a long pause, he asked:

“ ‘You have never seen a comedy, nor you, Christel; so you do not know how one speaks and declaims in such a piece. If you like, come up-stairs this evening, and I will read one aloud to you.’

“ ‘Will father be willing?’ I asked.

“He stared at me; it seemed to me that his eyes flashed angrily. ‘If you are afraid, never mind,’ said he, calmly, and turned his back upon me.

“Then I went after him. ‘Forgive me, Conrad; I will come.’

“And I did come. Hedwig was upstairs before our cousin Wieschen had put red-cheeked apples on the table,

of the nightingale the evening that Cousin Wieschen told me her story.

“I no longer followed Conrad’s words, and became lost in thought. Only when he paused I started up, and saw Hedwig’s pale face, from which her great eyes stared enthusiastically at him, and saw that his eyes met hers as though in silent question and answer.

“‘Do you understand how beautiful the language is?’ asked Conrad at length.

“Then Hedwig sprang up, her cheeks were flushed crimson, and she pressed her hand to her heart. She tried to speak, stood still a moment, then sat down again without a word.

“‘And you, Christel?’ he asked, turning his eager face to me. ‘Has it your approval, little sister?’

“I do not know why I stretched out my hands with such a gesture of dissent, and said harshly :

“‘No, Conrad ; it oppresses and frightens me.’

“‘Well, then, go,’ he cried, springing up, ‘read the catechism with Cousin Wieschen, and study your cook-book ; it may suit you better.’

“Then I saw that he was very angry, and tried to throw my arms around his neck ; but he repulsed me, and began to pace up and down the room like the deer whom they kept captive in the castle park—up and down, up and down, as though he were in a cage, which he would fain burst. Hedwig had left the room.

“Suddenly he paused.

“It is time for me to speak to father, Christel ; I can never stay here long : the narrow house seems like a prison to me, and the walls seem pressing upon me. I must go out into the world to work, or else ——’

“‘Conrad,’ I said in alarm, ‘you have left your bed for the first time to-day, and your wound is scarcely healed.’

“‘It will not get better here,’ he replied. ‘I only wish it were over, for father will not let me go without a sharp examination as to how I received this wound. And what I have to tell him will sadden him. It would be best for me to go without saying good-by, Christel.’

“Then suddenly the night when he had wished to go away secretly and I had begged him to stay, and he had fulfilled my request, came to my mind : at that time I was still a child, and pleaded with my *brother*; to-day he was my brother no longer. A feeling of intense shame kept me from throwing my arms around his neck and pleading : ‘Stay with me, Conrad. You are still ill : let me first cure you. Do not leave me to pine here in anxiety for you.’

“So I was silent. And as he began once more : ‘It must be, Christel ; it must be !’ and stood before me and seized my hands, I merely said :

“‘You must know what is best for you to do, Conrad.’

“‘Christel,’ he cried, and drew me to him, ‘you think I am ungrateful and wicked, and yet I am trying to do my duty—you cannot imagine what a struggle is going on in my mind.’

“I was silent, for to hear this again pained me.

“‘How could you know ?’ he continued. ‘If you had but a suspicion of what I have suffered for years, Christel, since the time when father told me that I was but a stranger among you, with neither father nor mother, you would have pity on me. Do not betray me. I shall go away to-morrow, perhaps to-day ; I cannot speak to father, for it never ends well.’

“‘And where are you going, Conrad ?’

“He laughed bitterly.

“‘Where? Oh, to Helmstadt ; back to my books ; only away from here. I will pass my examination, as I promised father. And then——’

“‘And then?’ I repeated. ‘And then, Conrad?’

“He was silent.

“‘Do not ask, Christel,’ said he at length.

“It seemed to me that the warm blood in my veins turned to ice.

“‘Conrad!’ I cried, ‘you will not come back again, if you go!’ And they were gone, my shame and pride.

“‘Conrad!’ I implored, grasping his shoulder, ‘tell me that you will come back! Tell me that you will not leave those who have loved you as their own child. Are we nothing to you? Can you blot out all memory of the house which has been your home; of the beautiful, happy times you have passed with us?’

“He hastily drew back a step, but did not answer. There was a long silence, and I thought I could hear my own heart-beats. The house was deathly still; only the lamp sputtered in the room, and then there was a light step outside, a hand felt softly along the wood-work of the door, as though seeking the knob. But Conrad suddenly turned, and his pale face flushed crimson.

“‘I will come, Christel,’ he whispered.

“‘My heart fairly leaped for joy, and my hands grasped his eagerly; but as I turned, Hedwig stood in the doorway, and the heavy dark wood-work seemed made to frame her charming self like a picture.

“‘I will come,’ said Conrad, once more. ‘How can you doubt it?’

“Now I knew that he would come, and yet—my joy was gone.

“It was early the next morning when I awoke, and as I went to the window and looked out into the garden, I saw, upon the white frost covering the paths, fine and small footprints, yet not those of a woman’s foot. I hurried into my clothes and knocked at Conrad’s door. Nothing

moved inside, and when I entered the room, in the gray dawn of the autumn day, I found it empty, and saw only a letter for father on the table by the bed; a note lay beside it, but my eyes were dimmed with hot tears. When I could at length see to read, I found it was a greeting to me and thanks for my care of him, and underneath, with three lines drawn below to emphasize it, was written :

“‘ Farewell ; do not be worried. Your faithful brother,
‘ CONRAD.’

“ Father scolded when he learned of Conrad’s flight, and yet I saw that he was not angry. ‘ It is easy to pardon a young man for omitting a *convenance* in his zeal for learning,’ he said, in answer to mother’s complaints. ‘ It may not have been easy for him to give an explanation of his escapade ; in that case, it is better that he went,’ he added, and a passing smile lit up his face as he recalled his own youth. He had once fought a duel, and had been severely lectured by his father for it, as he should have felt it his duty to lecture Conrad had they discussed the affair together.

“ So all was well until Conrad wrote. He had arrived at his destination very tired but safely, he wrote, and he had begun eagerly to make up what he had lost by his illness. He wished us all a happy Christmas, as he hoped to have, for he had been invited to pass the Christmas holidays in Dresden with a friend of a distinguished family of Saxon nobility ; he was especially pleased, as he had been told that he would have a chance to see the comedies produced at court, for which German and English actors had been engaged, as well as several operas.

“ We were all in father’s room when he received this letter. Hedwig stood at the window and gazed out at the

men who were working on the little theatre in the last rays of the sun ; but mother, Cousin Wieschen, and I had gathered around father, anxious to know how Conrad was.

“ That was a wretched hour. Father sent every one but me from the room ; I must seat myself preparatory to writing, but held the pen in my trembling hand for a long time before he began to dictate. His left hand lay clinched on the table, and his forehead wore an angry frown.

“ ‘ Now, then,’ he said at length.

“ ‘ In writing this to you, Conrad, my heart is heavy, for I know that you are on a path which leads you far from the only one it is your duty to pursue. With the power which was given me over you, I forbid you to turn your eyes upon such frivolities as play-acting. It brings evil to every human soul ; it is a temptation of the devil, and those who now rejoice in it will one day deeply regret it. But for you it is doubly unworthy to direct your eyes upon it, and it would be better that you were blind than that you should witness such foolishness.

“ ‘ I rather hope that, when you stand in your priestly garb in the chancel here, you will represent in a proper manner to our Prince that he will do well to break off from such unchristian doings, and will repeat to him the seventh chapter of Corinthians : “ For the fashion of this world passeth away.” How Eve is at the root of this matter, too, for, as I hear, the Frenchwoman has spurred on her future husband to imitate other frivolous courts !

“ ‘ I have now told you what I wish, and desire that you act as the obedient son of your always faithful father,

“ ‘ SEBASTIAN EHRENTAUT,

“ ‘ *Court Chaplain.*’

“ ‘ FALKERODE, *M., December, 1669.*’

“ I would gladly have added a few loving words, but did not know how to do it, for father read the letter over once more. When he gave it back to me to fold and seal, however, I hastily wrote :

“ ‘ A thousand greetings, Conrad, and do not worry.’

“ But afterward, as I passed through the sitting-room on my way to the kitchen, Cousin Wieschen beckoned to me. She was standing by the table making Christmas cakes. ‘ What did I tell you, Christel ?’ she whispered, cutting out the dough. ‘ The bird sings as his nature demands, and if another song is whistled to him each day, he will yet keep to his own.’

“ ‘ I wish he were home,’ I sighed.

“ The old woman looked at me slyly : ‘ I believe it, I believe it, my girl. Or do you think your cousin is blind ? You are as pale as wax, and you no longer laugh ; your heart palpitates, and you no longer sleep so well. Is it not so ? I know very well what all that means. I will make you a tonic of red wine, iron nails, and elder-berry plucked before sunrise on Whitsunday. That will help you.’

“ ‘ Oh, cousin, what are you thinking of ?’ said I, and yet felt the blood rush to my face. I hurried into mother’s room, and seated myself at my spinning-wheel. Mother’s hands were folded in her lap, and her eyes were red as though from weeping. But Hedwig sat at the window, her delicate head outlined sharply against the bright background, and sang softly to herself as she spun, as was her habit : it seemed as though she longed for spring, for May breezes, for something sweet and unspeakably lovely, so that my heart beat more rapidly, and my foot paused on the treadle. I thought I heard the nightingales singing, and saw the young foliage of the linden-tree, and a pale face with two brilliant blue eyes, and the words rang in my ears : ‘ Stay with me, Christel,

so that I do not succumb to the struggles and unrest of my heart : we have always loved each other dearly ! ’

“ Many stars flash up in the sky,
Many leaves wave upon the tree,
Many flowers grow in the field near by,
Many times each hour do I think of thee,”

sang Hedwig—oh, was it not so ?

“ I started up.

“ ‘ What are you thinking of, child ? Are you sleeping in broad daylight ? ’ asked mother pleasantly. But as I looked at Hedwig, her pale face flushed crimson. We stared each other in the eyes, and she asked :

“ ‘ Why are you blushing so, Christiana ? ’

“ ‘ And you ? ’ I answered, for the sake of saying something. ‘ Have you left a sweetheart behind you, up in the mountains ? ’

“ Then she threw her head back proudly. ‘ I could have had many a one, but a man who knows nothing save of shooting and dogs is not to my taste.’

“ But mother reproved her for speaking thus : ‘ Who tries to rise too high, usually hits the ceiling.’

“ Then she was silent and went on spinning ; but her young face was proud and defiant, and she made no answer when I spoke to her, and it was so for a long time. But out-doors the snowflakes danced merrily, and spring and happiness were far away.

“ This was a severe winter ; we were fairly snowed in up here in the mountains, and many a quiet evening passed during which scarcely a word was spoken, and only the spinning-wheels hummed softly, and the storm rattled the window-blinds loudly. There was trouble everywhere—avalanches in the forests, the game starved, and in human homes there were sickness and grief.

“But when the first violets bloomed in April, His Serene Highness brought his young wife home. The wedding was solemnized at Dijon, in the distant country of France. Now a succession of festivities, to which many foreign princes had been invited, awaited the newly wedded pair. Hedwig knew of all this ; she seemed fairly bewitched by the old woman, the Prince’s valet’s wife, who had a room in the castle, and could tell of everything that was going on there. Her Argus eyes saw everything, and the courtiers were not very fond of her, since her sharp ears heard more than was meet.

“When the grand entry took place, Hedwig and I stood on the steps in front of our house. People from all the country round crowded on the large square ; many fine arches of green were erected, and each house was decorated, and from all the windows peered curious faces. From the castle tower floated the coat of arms of the young couple, and as the train approached cannons were discharged, so that the very mountains echoed. The soldiers, in gala uniform, formed a hedge ; the princely servants, in rich liveries—some mounted, some on foot—marched first ; then came the adjutants, and the chamberlain in a coat almost covered with gold embroidery, and mounted on a richly caparisoned charger ; then the coach drawn by four horses, and in it the maids of honor, looking like rare Holland tulips, as Cousin Wieschen said. Many cavaliers rode after them, in great splendor. The spring sun had never gazed upon a more brilliant spectacle.

“Beside our Prince, in the gold satin cushioned coach, reclined a lovely, slender, dark woman, bowing on all sides ; her dark eyes shone happily, vying with the jewels lavishly adorning her silver-embroidered gown. I thought she would now look at the windows of our house, where

my father was posted with all the insignia of his office, which he had donned that day with great pain. She glanced at them, but she turned her head quickly, and at a sign from her husband she gazed at the theatre, upon whose pediment could now be read the proud inscription, 'Apollini et Musis,' and many could see how the young wife clapped her slender hands in delight.

"When I turned to look for my father he had left the window, and as I hurried to his room, he sat gloomily in his arm-chair, and would not answer me, question him as I might. So I went sadly out, and just then the carriage in which Princess Liselotte sat passed, and with the hurrahs of the people were mingled music and the discharge of cannon, and Hedwig stood behind the iron railing, which she clutched with both hands, and gazed delightedly after the procession winding up the castle hill. Her eyes stared out of her pale face, as though they longed to be amid such entrancing, strange splendor.

"She looked very lovely under the wreath of violets which she had placed on her head early that morning, standing and gazing at herself in the glass for hours, and many a strange cavalier in the procession glanced at her. And when mother noticed this, she said that we must go into the garden—it was not proper for respectable girls to stand on exhibition, since there was nothing more to see. Hedwig started as though awakened from a dream, but followed me into the garden without a word. Here it was quiet, and the bushes had put out their first young leaves; only occasionally a faint sound of the rejoicings penetrated to our ears.

"Hedwig flew before me down the path leading to the arbor, her black gown floated about her dainty figure. I followed her slowly, and paused here and there before a flower bed, and before the one which had formerly be-

longed to Conrad. Since then I had always tended it, and this year had sown his name in flower seeds, and to-day rejoiced to see that they had begun to sprout, and the name 'Conrad' was visible in tender green writing. I stooped to root up a weed, but as I entered the arbor I found Hedwig, her face buried in her hands; the violet wreath lay on the ground, and she sobbed loudly and bitterly.

"What is the matter, Hedwig?' I asked in alarm.

"She raised her face, and tears hung on her dark lashes.

"I have such a longing!' she answered.

"For what, Hedwig?'

"Then she rose and stretched out her arms as though she would fain fly up into the clear blue sky, far away from the small quiet garden, into unknown space.

"I do not know,' said she then, and her eyes followed a bird soaring quickly on high, so that in a few minutes he became a mere point to our eyes.

"I let her alone, and did not tell mother that she sat in the arbor or in the forest for hours at a time, dreaming in broad daylight. But once when she was about to slip into the castle park, father saw her, and told her harshly that it was not proper for her to wander there alone—a girl belonged in the house. But she sat by the window, and saw everything that went on. And there was much to see, for the court was maintained now in far more magnificence than formerly: many strange princes came and went, bringing troops of servants with them, who frequently gathered on the square before our house, and there was great feasting under the lindens in front of the castle, and up in the banquet-hall dancing and drinking, so that the nights were like a Walpurgis night.

"The company of actors, too, were quartered in our vicinity—all foreigners; and many from distant Italy,

with their black eyes and hair and olive skins. They strolled past our house frequently, and at times a bold glance would fall upon our window when Hedwig sat there; then she would smile charmingly and lean forward, so that I was ashamed and would no longer sit by the window. Soon mother forbade her to sit there with her sewing or spinning, and Cousin Wieschen kept a strict watch.

“But when, one day, His Highness invited father, and us as well, to witness a French play by a Mr. Molière, my father became furious, and it was with difficulty, and only through mother’s gentle persuasion, that he could be brought to thank His Highness properly for his kindness, and say that he thought it unfitting his position as a clergyman to be present, and with leave of His Highness he and his family would remain at home. He was angry for days, and closed the blinds of his window from which he could see the hated building.

“Such annoyances did not, however, trouble me much. I counted every hour until Conrad would return; a gracious letter had come from His Highness saying that Conrad should deliver his first trial sermon on Whitsunday in the castle chapel. Princess Liselotte had sent her ‘godson’ a gown of the costliest Brabant cloth, the collar of the finest linen—and this hung, carefully protected from dust, in his little room, and every day I went in, opened the window, and dusted. Then my heart was filled with the secret happiness of expectation, and often I sat there dreamily staring at the sunbeams creeping along the wall, and imagined how a man’s dark curly head would bend over the desk in grave study, and thought I could hear his deep voice say: ‘All is well with me now, my darling little sister!’

“Then I paused in my revery. ‘Not sister!’ my heart

cried, and I sprang up. 'No! a sweeter, a thousand times sweeter name!' And I thanked God that he was not my brother, and folded my hands in prayer for her who had given him life; who had remained solitary, although she had a right to love—to the sacred love of a child. Poor Liselotte! I could never again be angry with her, for his sake.

"And he came. Oh, do not ask me what our meeting was—that meeting of which I had dreamed for hours, in shy longing. Who can describe such an event? I only know that I fastened a bunch of forget-me-nots in my brown frock, and a blue ribbon in my hair; I only know that Cousin Wieschen saluted me with a laugh, and that in the evening I walked up and down in the garden, until finally, almost unconsciously, I opened the gate and wandered along the edge of the forest, down the road along which he must come. The sky was crimson with the sunset glow, the air was fragrant, and the breeze fanned my cheeks and whispered to the leaves. I seated myself under a tree at the edge of the road and looked for him: the birds flew home to their nests above me, and from the castle tower came the last tones of the bell; then no sound all around me but the chirping of the crickets—calm peace of evening everywhere.

"Then a tall figure came around the corner of the forest, a light knapsack on his back, a staff in his hand; he walked along with as lofty and erect a bearing as any one ever had. 'Conrad!' I tried to call to him, and yet could not; I could only go to meet him, at first quickly, then my steps became more slowly, and then I paused: I felt strangely timid. But he had recognized me and quickened his pace; now two hands clasped mine, and the voice that I had so often heard, waking and in dreams, said: 'God bless you, Christiana.'



“Yet I could not look at him, and he threw his arm around me and said jokingly: ‘Oh, did you come to meet me, and yet have not a word for me?’

“Then I looked at him; those were the same blue, earnest eyes, and the dear face, but it was pale, with lines telling of work and sorrow.

“‘You are not strong yet, Conrad,’ said I; ‘but now you will rest with us. I hope you will be content here.’

“He pressed my hand: ‘God grant it!’ And we walked on together, and as he walked silently at my side I glanced at him occasionally, and thought that the world had never been so lovely as now in the fading sunset glow. He had come, what further care had I?

“And days as lovely as the spring followed: gradually the furrows of anxiety left my father’s brow, and his face softened when he spoke of Conrad. My mother’s eyes followed him, and at times she glanced from him to me, and her grave lips parted in a fairly roguish smile. Conrad sat up-stairs over his books, and prepared a sermon for Whitsunday. We saw but little of him; he had chosen a room overlooking the garden, that he might be undisturbed. Sometimes, when I walked down the garden path, he stood at the window gazing thoughtfully out at the waving green branches of the linden-tree; sometimes I heard him walking up and down his room for hours.

“Once he came down into the garden when he saw me. ‘You look pale, Conrad; you study too much,’ I said to him.

“He shook his head. ‘Not enough,’ he answered, and, sighing as though heavily oppressed, he added: ‘Am I not too young, Christiana, for such a responsible calling?’

“‘No, no, Conrad: it is not a question of age, but of ability to hold such an office, and that I know you have.’

“‘Father thinks so too,’ said he, ‘and yet I doubt it.’

“Then I laughed at him, but at heart I was worried about him, for he was often cross and irritable when yet no one had offended him. He avoided Hedwig in an almost rude manner, and paid no more attention to her than to the gray cat when it passed him on the stairs : she was not vexed with him for this ; at most, she gave him a strange smile. But on Ascension Day, as we sat under the linden in the garden, and Hedwig sang as we worked, he closed his window so violently that one of the panes of glass broke ; but Hedwig acted as though she had noticed nothing, and went on singing, neither louder nor softer, and yet I thought it was more bewitchingly beautiful than before.

“‘Hush, Hedwig,’ said I ; ‘it disturbs Conrad.’ Then she laughed her sweet, silvery laugh, and a chair was violently pushed aside up-stairs : steps came down the staircase, and Conrad passed close to us, without looking at us, and quickly as though he could not get away from us soon enough ; then the garden gate slammed, and all was still.

“‘It is wrong,’ I said ; ‘you disturb him in his work, Hedwig. How can he write what will touch the hearts of his hearers, and lead them to God, when you are acting so foolishly down here?’

“She did not answer, but rose and went farther into the garden ; and when, after a while, mother wanted her, she was nowhere to be found.

“At twilight Conrad came back, and I heard him go directly to father’s room. He remained there a long time, and supper, which Cousin Wieschen had carried out under the linden, became cold, and had to be carried away again. After a while, when it had grown darker, mother summoned me to father’s room. There was no light in

it, only the new moon shone through the window, and showed me father's face, resting among the pillows of his arm-chair.

“ ‘Christiana,’ said he, and his voice was milder than I had ever heard it before, ‘come nearer me ; I have something to tell you.’

“ I drew nearer and waited, but it seemed as though he would never find the right words. ‘I mean, about Conrad, child,’ he began, at length. ‘I think you have always loved him as dearly as a brother.’

“ ‘Yes, father,’ I stammered.

“ ‘But now it is time to tell you that he belongs to our family as little as the stranger who passes the door. He is not my son, as he is not your own brother—’ He was silent, and his eyes gazed at me in the twilight.

“ As I did not answer, he asked :

“ ‘Did you know that, Christiana ?’

“ ‘Yes,’ said I, timidly and anxiously.

“ ‘Then, do you know who his parents are ?’

“ I silently bowed my head, uncertain what answer to make.

“ ‘Where can you have learned this, since it is a secret ?’ he continued. ‘I hope it does not injure your opinion of him. He is a good fellow, Conrad, and well worthy of a good wife. I do not know whether it is true, as your mother thinks, that you look at each other differently than do a brother and sister ?’

“ ‘Father !’ I cried in terror.

“ But he took my hand and drew me nearer, and I knelt before him in the utmost confusion.

“ ‘He was a dreamy, absent-minded boy,’ he continued, ‘but now he has become a serious man, who in a short time will devote his life to the service of God. He has already told me that his heart has turned to you, and he

thinks you are well suited to be the wife of a young pastor. He wishes an answer from you on Whitsunday, after his sermon. You must consider carefully whether you are willing to be his wife, to cling to him through all the vicissitudes of this life until death parts you. What does your young heart say to this, Christiana ?’

“It seemed to me that the gloomy room had become heaven, and a celestial glory seemed blinding my eyes.

“‘Yes, father, yes—a thousand times !’ I stammered.

“‘And is his dark origin no objection to you ?’

“‘No, oh no ; I will love him the more. I will love him more for all that he lacks.’

“‘Then I will tell him, and do you go up into your room and pray to Him who fathoms each thought of our hearts.’

“I staggered out of the room and went up-stairs, and in my room I fell upon my knees beside the bed, buried my face in the pillow, and in my gladness did not know what words to frame in thankfulness. It seemed hard to bear this happiness alone, and yet Conrad was near me in his room. Did he not suspect that I longed for him at this moment ? Hastily I pushed back the hair which had fallen over my forehead, and opened the window ; the cool night-air fanned my heated brow ; the garden lay dark and silent below me. Only from Conrad’s window light shone on the leaves, and in there a shadow wandered restlessly up and down. Was he thinking of me, and the answer I would give him ? Ah, did he not know that it would be yes—yes, for all eternity ?

“Then a nightingale began to sing softly in the linden ; it sounded sweet and melancholy. I leaned far out of the window. ‘Conrad ! Conrad !’ came softly from my lips, and I paused in affright. But no one answered me, only the nightingale sang on, and I began to weep, yet knew not why.

“And yet there was a strange feeling of oppression with all my happiness, like clouds over the sun. I often asked myself how he could pass me without a glance if he loved me. ‘That is the way of studious gentlemen,’ Cousin Wieschen would tell me as a consolation, when I met him on the stairs with a face paler than it used to be, and so absorbed in thought that he did not notice me, although my dress touched him. ‘That is the way of studious gentlemen. They do not pay much attention to what goes on around them. You must become accustomed, my lamb, never to disturb him, but to wait patiently until he chooses to speak to you. Another man would always have time to tease and pet you, but that is not fitting for a clergyman. Your father was the same. I always said it was no easy task to be the wife of a parson.’

“I believed her, and yet would have changed places with no one in the world.

“Conrad continued absorbed in his books, so that I wondered how a sermon could possibly require so much time. Sometimes I heard him declaiming : his deep voice rang out melodiously—it seemed made for a clergyman—so that often I listened on the stairs, but could not understand the words ; and I sat sewing on a blue gown with a red-brown velvet ribbon on the edge, and when mother discovered me, she brought me two silver spangles fastened together with a little chain to hold the bodice together on the breast. And she said, with a smile : ‘These were on my wedding gown.’

“But Hedwig had grown pale and silent since that afternoon when she sang under the linden : she seldom opened her mouth to speak, and there were dark circles around her eyes. When she looked at Conrad it seemed as though her face turned paler than ever, and her brown eyes flashed gloomily at him. Sometimes I felt her

eyes resting angrily upon me, and I grew frightened, as though a weight were pressing down upon me. 'I do not know what is the matter with her,' said Cousin Wieschen. 'I sometimes think she has gone crazy, she talks so foolishly in her sleep.'

"She would stand by the window for hours, and idly watch the doings out in the square, or stare at the theatre.

One evening, as I opened the door of her room suddenly, she stood before her mirror, wonderful to see; she turned and stretched her arm out imperiously at me, so that I left the door wide open in my surprise, and remained on the threshold. She had thrown a sheet over her as drapery, and a fine muslin kerchief was fastened as a veil to her head; and so she stood, the sunlight shining on her brown hair and delicate arm, and hastily taking a step toward me, she cried:

" 'What will'st thou here? Naught in thy speech pleases me, nor can it ever please me; and mine, too, is distasteful to thee.'

" 'Hedwig,' I cried in horror, 'you are raving.' And I seized her hand and shook it; but she drew it away, and pushed me back.

" 'Pray go, then,' said she bitterly, 'and tell your father. I am willing for him to turn me out of the house; then I will be free, and need not be walled up in this house, which is worse than a cloister.'

" 'Do not be ungrateful,' I cried, offended. 'What more liberty do you wish? What is refused you here?'

" 'Would you understand if I told you?' she replied, smiling mockingly. 'Have you any idea that there is anything higher in this life than narrow, shut-in happiness? That a woman's heart can long for something more than a spinning-wheel, kitchen, and nursery? Oh, pray go; how can you understand it? Does not your face always wear

a contented smile, so that one might really be envious, if it were worth while envying you the thin broth which is the intellectual nourishment of your life ? ’

“ I was silent, and could not answer ; but as I turned uncertainly, Conrad stood in the door, and stared past me at the slender girl in the strange raiment, with the sunlight shedding a golden glory over her.

“ ‘ Conrad,’ I asked timidly, ‘ what is the matter with her ? She is raving ; pray speak——’

“ Then his eyes slowly wandered from her to me, and stared at me from his pale face as though they were gazing at empty space, so cold and dead did they look.

“ ‘ Conrad,’ I tried to cry, but my heart suddenly ached ; the word died on my lips, and he turned again to Hedwig.

“ ‘ What was that you said a few moments ago ? ’ he asked gently, ‘ and where did you hear it ? ’

“ She had flushed crimson ; but, as though she felt that he would not judge her harshly, she drew nearer to him, seized his hand, and led him to the open window.

“ ‘ There ! ’ she cried, pointing to the theatre ; ‘ and if it was a sin, may God forgive me, but I cannot believe that anything so noble and beautiful can be accursed.’

“ He made no reply, only gazed dreamily over at the white building.

“ ‘ Whom did you see play Antigone ? ’ he then asked.

“ Life seemed to return to the girl, and she raised her clasped hands in rapture. ‘ *Whom !* ’ she cried. ‘ Oh ! Conrad, that you will never guess. But she was beautiful, sublimely beautiful, as she entered in her white gown, her face distorted with pain and grief. You know the court people played yesterday for their own amusement, and the old valet’s wife, whom I have often helped pass a weary hour, took me in on the sly with her, and I saw her from the darkest corner—Princess Liselotte, as Antigone——’

“ ‘Princess Liselotte?’ he asked, while my heart beat almost to bursting.

“ ‘Yes, Conrad! Oh, would that you had been there!’ and she added, in a caressing, coaxing tone: ‘Are you angry with me? Do you, too, say that it is sinful?’

“ Then he quickly turned away; his face, so pale before, had flushed, and he left the room without looking at me; yet I stood, timid and anxious, close to the door. But Hedwig tore the kerchief from her head, threw it on the ground, and began to weep so that I feared she would be ill. I thought to make short work of it by going to father, and telling him that Hedwig had disobeyed his commands; and I was angry with Conrad for not reproving her, but thought that he had feared that he would become angry, since his was a violent temperament; yet my heart was oppressed with doubt.

“ As I went down-stairs, I met Conrad.

“ ‘Christiana,’ said he, ‘are you going to father?’ It was the first word he had spoken to me since the day that he asked father for my hand.

“ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘for I am angry that Hedwig does not obey him, since she lives in our house, and already has done things she should not.’

“ He said nothing, but looked at me. I do not know what was not expressed in this look: compassion, reproach, and entreaty—silent, sad entreaty.

“ ‘Well, go then,’ said he at length, and quickly vanished into his room. It seemed to me that he was angry with me. But as I entered father’s room, he said, vexedly: ‘Where have you been so long? Have you forgotten that I wish to dictate to you the sermon for Conrad’s ordination?’

“ I hastily seated myself to write, and as I saw that he was impatient I refrained from angering him—was silent as to what I had heard, and wrote as he dictated:

“ ‘Jeremiah, first chapter, the sixth and seventh verses. “Ah, Lord God ! behold, I cannot speak : for I am a child.

“ ‘ “But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child : for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.” ’

“ I wrote, as father dictated, that Conrad was called by the will of God, young in years, to a high office ; that he must strive to lead a blameless life, and do his duty, for intelligence is the true gray hair, and a godly life the true age. And it closed thus : ‘ Therefore from this time forth, Conrad, called Ehrentraut, take the place of your old adopted father, the court chaplain, Sebastian Ehrentraut, since thou hast well studied, and in a proper manner, in Helmstadt, the word of God and the teachings of our Church, and hast promised and vowed that thou wilt not rest only upon these studies, but wilt fulfil the duties of thy office with faithfulness and zeal, and wilt now, after the examination, be ordained in accordance with the apostolic words.’

“ Then I had to read it aloud ; and as my father’s substitute, a calm, mild old man, arrived just at this moment, he listened, and said :

“ ‘ May the maid also write : “ So may God give him His blessing, that he may follow in his dear old father’s footsteps, and be of like service to his Church.” ’

“ And when I had written this, father said : ‘ Carry it up-stairs to Conrad that he may read it, and ask him if he is satisfied with the sermon to be preached at his ordination. He may come and tell me himself.’

“ I went to his room in embarrassment ; he probably did not hear my knock, but sat at his writing-desk among a pile of books and papers. He was not writing but reading, and his dark, curly hair had fallen over his forehead, so absorbed was he in his book. I went softly up to him,

and as I looked over his shoulder my eyes fell upon a book lying on the open Bible, and I read : ‘Antigone, a Greek Play, translated into German by ——’ I could not read the name, so startled was I. Quietly I laid the ordination sermon on the desk and went away. Conrad did not move, and as I closed the door he still sat in the same position, staring at the book.

“Everything went on as usual in the house, for I had not the courage to complain of Hedwig’s disobedience, nor did I wish to distress my parents by telling them that Conrad knew of it. But that could not prevent me from becoming sad, and I sighed deeply and wished for Whitsunday, thinking that when once I was Conrad’s betrothed all would be different ; thinking that he was worried more than was needful over his first sermon and the grave responsibilities awaiting him.

“When the last week before Whitsunday began, a grand cleaning took place in our house, and Cousin Wieschen was in a bad temper, as she always was when there was much work on hand, and rattled her bunch of keys louder than ever—now she was in the attic, now her voice came from the cellar. ‘She has the devil of cleaning in her,’ said my father, yet he was not angry, for he said teasingly to me that everything must be spotlessly clean for such an important festival as was expected—not only our minds but everything about us. And so the house was turned upside down, the rooms shone with spotlessness, and cellar and storeroom were well stocked, as for the blessed Christmas time ; and mother was very busy, laying in even more supplies, for many of our relatives were expected to visit us.

“Many of my experiences have become vague in my recollection, but I remember one event with the utmost



mournful distinctness, and have not forgotten the slightest detail of that hour which made me miserable for a long time. How often I still dream of it ; how often the present vanishes and the past enthralls me, so that I live that tormenting hour over again. Then the solitary room becomes peopled, the clock again ticks loudly and plainly in the stillness, then the linden sways in the breeze as at that time, and the words which broke my heart ring in my ears, and the Whitsun bells also, which ushered in the bitterest day of my life. All the pain I felt then seizes upon me, drives me out of my room down into the garden, and from there along the path to the woods, and it is long before I can return home calm again.

“Two days before Whitsunday, when the flowers were in blossom and the air was filled with fragrance, I sat with Hedwig in the garden. We were winding wreaths to adorn the chancel where Conrad was to stand for the first time. Her hands trembled as they fastened the flowers and greens together, her movements were hurried, and finally she asked :

“‘Do you not think it would be hard, Christiana, to forgive any one who wronged you bitterly?’

“She looked at me with strange emotion, and under her tight brown cotton gown her bosom heaved convulsively. And as I stared at her in astonishment, she averted her eyes and turned over the flowers, yet selected none.

“‘I do not know, Hedwig,’ I replied, ‘for as yet no one has wronged me ; but if it happened, I would always try to think of the person with mildness.’

“She was silent, and continued turning over the flowers. I thought her eyes had grown moist, and drew closer to her.

“‘Why do you ask such questions, Hedwig, and what makes you sad?’ I asked, and deep pity for her overcame

me, for she was a poor orphan child, a thousand times poorer than I, who had parents and a home, and was looking forward to sweet happiness. I put my arms around her neck. 'Hedwig, I hope you will some day be as happy as I hope to be soon, and always remember that you have a true friend in me when you are sad or oppressed—in me and in Conrad.'

"Then she sprang up abruptly, and her hands pushed me away so roughly that she hurt me.

" 'Leave me !' she cried.

"Her lips trembled as though she would say something more, but she was silent, and hurriedly began to fasten flowers together, yet she bound them so unevenly and tore them apart again. Finally she threw the wreath on the bench where she had been sitting, and hurried out of the arbor.

"I did not know what could be the matter with her. I had no suspicion then that her conscience was fighting with the most powerful passion of the human heart, and which one only conquers to bleed one's self ; had no suspicion that already the dagger which was to give me the death-blow was bared, and that only a cowardly hesitation before she brought this great guilt upon herself, made her ask such questions. I finished the work alone, until it lay before me, charming with its gay splendor of color, and Cousin Wieschen praised it as she came through the garden.

"And so came Whitsun Eve, and the house and garden were quiet ; the night-wind whispered softly in the trees, but nothing else stirred. Conrad did not come to supper ; only we women sat around the table, as usual. We said but little, and I scarcely touched the food ; nor could Hedwig eat, and she looked ill, so that Cousin Wieschen prescribed herb-tea for her. We finished the meal silently, and each left the room alone.

“The last rays of the setting sun shed a rosy light upon my father’s grave face as he sat by the window in his room. ‘To-morrow I shall see fulfilled the wish of my heart,’ said he, as I kissed him good-night. ‘Has not God always dealt graciously with us?’ And as I went out he warned me: ‘Be quiet, so that Conrad shall not be disturbed this evening.’ So I went up to my little room and took out from the chest the gown I was to wear to-morrow, and arranged everything—my heart filled with happiness. I even cut a few sprays from the myrtle vine, and of rosemary a few twigs, to lay in my hymn-book. And when all was ready, I put out the light, and seating myself beside the open window, began to dream of the morrow’s happiness.

“It was a dark, sultry evening in early June; the small room seemed suffocatingly close to me, or was it only that the blood rushed to my heart? Through the branches of the linden-tree I could see flashes of distant lightning, and the perfume of elder and other blooming shrubs was overpowering.

“I do not know how I happened to fall asleep, but I waked with a start. I thought I had had a bad dream, for it could never be the truth! It seemed to me that I heard whispered words of love; and plainly, so plainly that my heart overflowed with wild rage and misery, the words now fell on my ear:

“‘Hedwig, Hedwig, I cannot help it; may God in His mercy be gracious to me—it is not so great a sin as if I desecrate His holy house with a false oath!’

“Then silence, and again his voice, so sweet that I shuddered in pain and wonder, and yet I clinched my hands angrily, and shook with delirious fury.

“‘What are misery, scorn, and calumny now, Hedwig? Is not a heart that understands me worth more than all else?’

“And I heard a suppressed cry of joy from Hedwig’s

lips, and whispering—words that I could not understand ; then there were steps on the stairs, and his door closed. My head sank heavily upon the window-seat, my hands clasped each other, and I did not know whether I were waking or dreaming.

“ Scales seemed to fall from my eyes : had I been blind until this moment ? He had never loved me, had only reached out for me as a drowning man clutches at a straw ; he had thought he could master his passion were he bound to his office and to a wife, but at the last hour it had conquered him. What would come now ?

“ In my confusion and woe, such thoughts crowded upon my poor mind until I roused myself, and tottered across the room. What I wished I did not know myself, when I stood in the hall. I thought of going to him, of telling him that his happiness was dearer to me than my own, that I would give him back his word, and would give my blessing to him and Hedwig, since he loved her more than me. But as I reached out for the door-knob, my hand sank down, and I had not strength to raise it again, and, shaking as though in a chill, I crouched outside his door in the darkness, for how long I know not.

“ Nothing stirred in the house ; only the old clock’s pendulum moved on, untroubled that its swing brought gloomy hours of misery. And gradually it grew lighter, and the gray dawn shone through the window over the stairs. Suddenly I started up ; it seemed to me that something stirred in Conrad’s room. I pressed myself tightly against the wall, for just then the door opened, and he came out. He passed close to me on his way to the stairs, at the head of which he paused for a moment, leaning against the newel-post. In the dim light I saw his pale face, and distinguished his knapsack and staff, and slowly and heavily, like a weary man, he descended the first step,

and the heavy, slow steps echoed in the hall below ; now they stopped, then continued ; the garden door was softly opened, then all was still—terribly still.

“ ‘Conrad, Conrad !’ I tried to call, but could not. Thus may one feel who is carried to the tomb, apparently dead, as the light of day vanishes from his sight, and he is incapable of telling that he lives. ‘Conrad, Conrad !’ I cried at length, but the sound of my voice frightened me. I rushed down into the garden, and ran down the damp path to the gate ; it was ajar, as though some one in his haste had forgotten to close it. The road leading around the corner of the forest lay solitary before me, but in the gray dawn my eyes perceived a white lace handkerchief, which hung, wet with dew, on the hawthorn-bush near the gate ; and I knew it, for Hedwig had worn it around her neck the day before.

“ ‘With her !’ I stammered. It seemed to me that I should lose my senses again, and with both hands I clutched the branches of the bush, not noticing the thorns which wounded me, as I stared into the distance. Gradually I became conscious of the fearful emptiness of the life which would now be mine. Behind me lay the garden of my youth, in which roses had bloomed until to-day—before me, in the gray dawn, was an endless nothingness.

“ And gradually it grew lighter and lighter. There was a crimson radiance in the east ; a lark soared upward with jubilant song. I have never wished to see the sun rise again.

“ So I stood until Cousin Wieschen shook me, and her faithful old face gazed at me in horror.

“ ‘God—God pity you, Christiana !’ she stammered. And as I looked up, the garden was bathed in golden sunlight, the birds sang in the trees, and the bells in the castle tower began to ring.

“ ‘Whitsunday !’ said I.

“ But the old woman threw her arm around me. ‘Are you dreaming? Do you not know what has happened? Your lover has gone, and with him your fine cousin; and your father is fighting the last fight of all in his room. Control yourself, and come, if you wish to see him alive.’

“ As I still stood there, incapable of comprehending it, she drew me by main force through the garden, for already gayly dressed people were passing the hedge, and she pushed me over the threshold which his foot had crossed earlier, and drew me into father’s room; and there lay my mother before the chair in which he rested; his face was as white as the linen upon which his head lay, and his fingers grasped convulsively an open letter. Somewhat aside stood father’s substitute, in his official robes, holding the vessels containing the blessed sacrament, his face troubled, while the doctor held the sick man’s hand and counted his pulse. There was a terrible stillness in the room.

“ But when father saw me he said :

“ ‘My poor child, your lot is the hardest.’

“ And again all was still. Then the knocker on the front door rapped, and the dying man sat up :

“ ‘He is coming, he comes back penitent. Make room for him !’

“ But when the door was violently thrown open, it was Walter, who threw himself down beside me sobbing, and embraced father’s knees, and again there was silence for a while; then his heart beat no more.

“ But the bells rang outside for the third time, and the people flocked to the church to hear Conrad. Then Cousin Wieschen went and drew the curtains before the windows, and bolted the door of the house where disgrace and dishonor had entered, and with them the dread mes-

senger of death. And when father was laid out I sat in my little room, before the window of which the linden branches tossed in the sunlight, and tried to pray. But when I began to speak, my lips would not frame words of prayer. My heart was angry and rebellious, and I shuddered at my own thoughts.

“Long years passed like a nightmare. I became very quiet, spun and sewed, and took care of my mother, who had been weak and ill since that day.

“Father’s successor occupied his room. He was unmarried, and gladly let mother, Cousin Wieschen, and me stay in the house instead of going to the house provided for the widow of a court chaplain—a small, cheerless building in the city below, which was now occupied by the very old widow of a pastor. Cousin Wieschen had always been a capable little woman, and cared for our welfare, which I would never have thought of myself. Everything was indifferent to me, and when a new morning dawned, and I awoke, it weighed upon me, and I thought, ‘Another day,’ and in the evening I rejoiced that it was over.

“Walter had long since taken to himself a wife, and was a father. He was installed in Wolferode as forester, and was an upright man, who clung to us with the old love. Only, when he talked of Conrad he could never speak of him otherwise than harshly and angrily. He called Hedwig a wench, and him a fool and scoundrel. At such times I would quietly leave the room, for such talk pained me.

“No day passed that I did not think of Conrad. We had never heard anything of him, and did not know where his fortunes had led him, the world is so large. But I wished no news of him. I cherished his memory in my heart as of one dead, for whom we never cease to mourn. Sometimes I thought that he might already be dead, and

such a thought was sweet and soothing. But when I pictured him living, and with Hedwig, my heart ached, and anger and jealousy filled it, while in anguish and shame I confessed to myself that shame and misery with him were better a thousand times than my solitary life here, far from him, although calm and secure. Then I imagined how he would clasp her in his arms and kiss her, while she sang to him the songs which had bewitched him, how he would care for her, and share the last morsel of bread, perhaps begged in poverty and misery, with her.

“Hedwig! May God forgive me! I hated her in my envy and jealousy, with a hatred such as can spring up only in a heart which has been robbed of its all.

“And so I became a gloomy woman, who gave pleasure to no one in this world, for even my mother complained that I only did what I must, and never had a pleasant word for her. I could not help it. Do roses bloom in a garden desolated by hailstorms?

“In the castle all was as usual. Many festivities and entertainments were held there now, as they had been formerly, and Princess Liselotte, with her lovely smile, still drove past our doors as though the years left no traces on her beauty, but she no longer looked up at the windows. What did she care where he who had once enjoyed the shelter of this house now roamed?

“When I was thirty years old, one autumn evening I stood in the garden and gazed over the hedge out across the country. The wind blew fiercely, and dark clouds chased each other across the sky. A fine rain wet my face, and hair, in which already there was many a silver thread. And as the storm pulled at my garments, and tore the last leaves from the trees, my thoughts were of Conrad, and that he would never again come up the path which he had so often trodden. To-day I had been

strangely reminded of him, for to-night they were to act in the theatre 'Romeo and Juliet,' which Conrad had read to us once on just such an autumn evening. Absorbed in my gloomy recollections, I began to wander up and down the garden for a long time, until it grew dark, and my wet garments dragged after me heavily.

"As I neared the gate again, I saw a man's tall figure standing near it; but in the twilight I could not distinguish his rank, and fancied he was a beggar, for beggars were common in our mountains. And as I was accustomed to give alms in memory of Conrad, I put my hand in my pocket, and drew out a groschen, going nearer to the man, to ask what he wanted and whether he would not be glad of some warm soup and dry shoes.

"But he who stood there did not move, nor take the offered gift, but leaned against the gate-post as though faint. Then a dim foreboding flashed to my mind.

"'Christiana!' rang in my ears, in the old, well-beloved voice.

"'Conrad!' I was about to cry in delight, but I controlled myself. My feet seemed rooted to the ground, and my pride and despised love rose in arms.

"'I will go away again immediately, Christiana, only let me come into the garden once more—the garden which was my childhood's paradise; and give me your hand once more, that I may die in peace. I have wandered for days and for nights; if you do not wish me to come in, I will go away without doing so, only say that you forgive me.'

"He stood close to me, and reached out for my hands, and in this moment everything that I had suffered seemed washed away, and at the sound of his voice the linden-tree rustled again, while the nightingale sang sweetly, as it had done years before.

"'Conrad!' said I, 'come in; it is inhospitable weather.'

“Then he came with me, and it seemed as though every step caused him great pain, for he breathed loudly and heavily. Mother and Cousin Wieschen were already asleep, so I took him to my room, in which the lamp burned, and the fire crackled in the stove.

“We looked at each other for a long time, without a word ; but burning tears ran down my cheeks. He stood before me a broken man, misery and want, hunger and grief and sickness on the pale face and in the shabby clothes he wore.

“‘This is all that I have accomplished, Christiana,’ said he, and two crimson spots appeared in his cheeks. ‘Apollo and the Muses have poorly rewarded me.’

“He smiled, but it was a mere contortion of the lips, and he sank down upon the sofa near by.

“‘Who told you to follow them?’ I was tempted to cry, through my tears. But why should I reproach him now? I hurried to fetch food and drink and dry clothes, but he detained me.

“‘It comes too late, Christiana ; I am happy now that I have seen you once more. Let me stay but a moment ; then I will bid you good-by, and never see you again.’

“‘You will stay, Conrad. I shall not let you go out in this storm. Sleep and warm yourself.’

“‘I cannot,’ he replied, and shook with cold. But, nevertheless, he drew a chair up to the stove, and eagerly drank the hot wine I brought him.

“‘Father died of grief for *me*. Your youth was embittered by *me*, and I am what you see,’ he began, after a long silence.

“‘Then you were not fortunate, Conrad?’

“He shook his head.

“‘It is easily told. The woman I loved betrayed me, art repulsed me—what else is there to tell?’

“ ‘Hedwig ! Hedwig !’ I cried, almost beside myself.

“ ‘If you ask in Dresden for Count Promnitz, they will mention her name to you,’ he whispered, in an almost suffocated voice. ‘And I—’ he added, dully, ‘my chest ! oh, my chest !’ And he sank back with a groan.

“ ‘Conrad ! my darling Conrad !’ I cried, ‘rest from your sorrow and wanderings here with me !’

“Then the dark eyes flashed once more with their old brilliancy, and he pressed my hand against his chest, but words failed him. And when the night was over, and the storm had subsided, I stood before him in silent pain. He who had been the joy and grief of my life had gone home, had passed away.

“And the day passed, and evening fell : Cousin Wieschen had laid him out, with many tears, and exclamations that she must experience this too. The fine kerchief, embroidered with the coat of arms, which she had kept for him all these years, now covered his calm face : he lay in the room he had once occupied ; the windows were open, the breeze blew the curtains far into the room, and moved the white sheets on the bier. The windows of the castle above were brilliantly illuminated, and down the hill came a procession with torches, a gay crowd with music. The court was on its way to the theatre. The golden inscription shone treacherously as I stood at the window : ‘Apollini et Musis.’

“Princess Liselotte was probably now sitting there, laughing and jesting, while he who had inherited his hot blood from her lay here cold and dead. Was there no fidelity on earth ?

“But hark ! There was a faint creak of the stairs, and a rustle over the hall-floor as of a woman’s velvet train : a hand turned the door-knob, and a woman’s tall figure appeared on the threshold. In the pale moonlight the

golden spangles on her gown sparkled from under the waterproof which she had thrown around her; she hurried up to the bier upon which he rested, and bending over him she raised the cloth from his face, and her cheeks rested against his cold ones.

“I drew far back into the window recess, and listened to her. She did not say a word, she only caressed him fondly, as though she would fain make good to him in death what she had omitted in life. How she had entered the house I do not know, nor who had brought her the news of his death. But on Conrad’s breast lay a laurel wreath, the only one life had bestowed upon him.

“We buried him near the linden-tree; no cross marks his grave. But I often sit on the stone bench, and hear the nightingales sing, in the spring-time, or watch the leaves fall, and ——”

Here the manuscript ended.

It was as though I awaked from a vivid dream. The fire had long since gone out in the stove, and the first gray light of dawn filled the room.

Did I not say that these walls could speak?

Still under the spell of what I had read, I rose and left the room. The hall was still dark, only through the window over the stairs fell a faint light, and showed me the still firm oaken stairs and artistic iron bannisters. I easily found the door which led from the high vaulted kitchen out into the garden. A simple little garden, probably entirely changed in the course of two centuries, it lay before me in the dawn, wild and desolate. But a path still led through the middle down to the little gate in the hedge, and at my right, near the house, stood the witness of past joys and sorrows, the magnificent old linden-tree,

and its branches almost touched the small panes of the little window in the upper story—Christiana's room.

I went over to the old sandstone bench, and gazed at it. It was very simple, with no back, and rested upon two finely carved griffins, sitting upright. Withered leaves lay thick on the ground around, and probably covered the spot where Conrad was buried. I pushed them aside with my foot, and—yes, under the moist leaves lay a weather-beaten tombstone :

CONRAD EHRENTAUT,
A. Domini, 1680 ;

nothing more—and this almost illegible, scarcely distinguishable.

And gradually it grew lighter and lighter, the sparrows began to twitter in the trees, and suddenly house and garden were bathed in dazzling sunlight, the tops of the lindens murmured softly in the morning breeze, and in the arched doorway of the entrance stood Dorchen, bright as the morning itself.

“ Oh, here you are, Mr. Architect. I bring you your coffee. Grandmother saw your lamp burning all night long. Did you not sleep at all ? ” she asked, looking at me.

“ No, Dorchen, I did not sleep, ” I replied.

“ Were you reading the old papers about Christiana ? ” said she. “ They are sad, are they not ? Grandmother says her grandmother knew her ; she was a very old woman then, and she had one great aversion—— ”

“ Indeed, Dorchen ! What was that ? ”

“ She could not bear the theatre over there, and when she went out she always made a wide circuit through the garden ; but poor, hungry people, vagabonds, actors, and such like, she gave to with willing hands, whatever she had. Do you understand that, Mr. Architect ? ”

“ Yes, Dorchen. But now, where is my coffee ? For I

must go to work. In years I have not looked forward with so much pleasure to anything as to the renovating of this old house. Do you understand that ? ”

“No,” laughed the girl, “it is a gloomy old nest ; I should not like to live in it. Only think, Christiana is also buried under the linden.”

“Really ? ” I asked, with interest.

“Grandmother says so. I think her sweetheart had lain there for years when she, Christiana, died.”

Singing a gay song, Dorchen ran into the house, and was already up-stairs when I mounted the staircase, almost reverently.

On my work-table, among all the plans, sketches, and estimates, from that time lay those yellow pages, and when I was too weary of the dust of centuries, I buried myself in the old love-story, which, amid all the rubbish and mould, bloomed as sweetly as a fresh rose on a bush blighted by the storm.

I have a love for old houses.





V.

MY COUSIN URSULA.

THE twenty-fourth of December ! There is something strange about this day : one cannot escape its charm, even when one is a solitary old man as I am, whom the storms of life have gradually robbed of fresh youth. I seem to myself like the dying old linden-tree in the garden, by the city walls. I well remember when it was young and green—now it is only an old leafless trunk : we have both grown old. The mayor recently asked me casually if I did not want to have it cut down, and a young one planted in its place. No, as long as I live—never, for a large part of my sweet, rapturous youth is bound up with that linden-tree.

The twenty-fourth of December ! It seems to me no other day is so made for recollections. A trifle, an accident, brings back old, almost forgotten stories, and makes them seem so vivid that we are frightened, and our old hearts beat more rapidly with pain and pleasure. An accident, I said : so it was with me.

I stand at the window in my room, and gaze out into the street. Then a maid comes hurrying along through the snow, parcels of cake under each arm, and three great twists of French bread, and disappears into the stately house opposite. A plump, pretty woman just then comes

behind the white curtains of the window ; it seems to me that the mayor's wife turns from red to white, under her dainty lace cap. I knew her when she was a six-weeks-old baby ; now she has grown sons. I saw in the room behind her, as she opened the window, a large Christmas-tree, laden with all sorts of gay trifles. But, good heavens ! what is the matter with the woman ? She closes the window and disappears—now she stands at the open front door, and spreads out her arms. God bless her ! her sailor has come home.

The woman has thrown her arms around a blue sailor jacket ; I see a blonde, curly head, under its oilskin cap, resting on her shoulder ; now they are in the house. Old Rieka drags a huge chest up the steps ; now she, too, is inside, and the door is closed. What a tall, slim fellow he has become, this boy whom the mayor's wife has just pressed to her mother's heart, almost as well-grown as——

That was the accident, and suddenly Henry rose before me—Henry as he lived and breathed, his sun-burned, handsome face, his kind blue eyes, and blond hair. I will think of him no more.

I leave the window, open my bookcase, and take down three or four books from the middle shelf, where I keep my best literature. I take one of the books, seat myself in an arm-chair, and open it. Between the very first pages lies a long dark curl of woman's hair : hastily I look at the title, "Hannah and the Little Chicken," and an inscription in my handwriting.

"My dear Ursula, for Christmas, 18—, William Nordmann, *stud. jur.*," I read. Good heavens ! I take the curl and wind it round my finger, and suddenly this curl is on the head of a light, charming little creature. I see a dark, beautiful face, glossy dark braids, and a pair of dark, childish eyes.

The second accident. My youth comes back to me—me, the old, solitary man. Come then, ye forms! These are the same rooms through which you once walked.

Father's writing-desk still stands on the same spot, and there, when he was taken away in the midst of his activity, I have seated myself and begun work in his place. My parents' pictures hang as usual over the sofa, and gaze down at me lovingly and confidingly. Come, and I will receive you ceremoniously; here is a bottle of Haute Saunterne, my father's favorite wine, and a friendly hand has given me cake, so that I, too, may realize that it is Christmas Eve. Twilight has gradually settled down. Hark! there are the bells of St. Mary's; they ring out for the sacred evening as solemnly and full toned as formerly. I fill a glass to the very brim: "Welcome to you and the Christmas Eves of my youth, with their fragrant fir-trees and lighted candles."

We both leave our playthings under the lighted tree, Henry and I, and stand before the life-size portrait in oils of our mother, which she gave to father to-day. Now our parents hold each other's hands, and gaze into each other's eyes.

"Why did you give father your picture?" Henry asked mother; "you are always with him."

Then our parents exchanged glances again, and mother opened her arms and pressed our blonde heads to her bosom, and as I gazed at her tender face in surprise, her eyes were full of tears.

We could not understand this then, for Henry was but seven and I five years old, but soon we learned to understand it.

Two more Christmas Eves passed, twice more the Christmas-tree burned in the great parlor, dressed by

mother's own hands, then came a Christmas Eve when our old house was desolate and dark. She who had formerly dressed our tree had slumbered since June, under the sod in St. Mary's Churchyard. What such a loss is to a child it cannot at first realize, thank God ! Otherwise such a little heart would be crushed under the weight ; only gradually does it realize the gap in its existence.

On this motherless Christmas, we had secretly bought presents for father with our savings and had thought that the note-book from Henry, and the beautiful six-sided pencil from me, would greatly please him. And we had been into the garden, and had picked fir branches and holly in the snow-storm, and we had gone hand in hand to St. Mary's to our mother's grave. She had always been so fond of the smooth, pointed leaves, which we planted in the snow covering her grave. The grave-digger's young wife nodded to us pleasantly and compassionately, as we trotted back to the entrance, and called her own stout boys in from the street where they were snow-balling each other. It had begun to grow dark, and involuntarily we quickened our pace ; the church-bells now rang out for the service. The streets had become more quiet, only the bakery was still crowded with people buying fresh cakes.

"We did not bake cakes at home this time, Willy," said Henry to me.

I shook my head. But the Christmas-tree must be lighted ; we had agreed to that. Father was surely home now.

Our street was quite deserted ; every one was probably in the house preparing for the distribution of gifts. Only the old Christmas song rang out, sung by poor, shivering children in front of our house. "Praise God, ye Christians all, to-day—God, on His throne on high." Our door was opened softly, and Hannah gave the largest girl some-

thing. "Go away, children," we heard her say; "sing somewhere else." And when she saw us she added, in her Holstein German: "Oh, there you are, boys; your father has been looking everywhere for you."

Father sat at his writing-desk in his room, and gazed at the picture of mother; in the twilight the delicate head rose above the white gown as though upborne on angel wings. "Henry, Willy," said father, as we stood before him, "it is the first Christmas without mother; she no longer can dress a tree for you."

He paused, for his voice suddenly broke, and he pointed to the round table in front of the sofa. "There is something there for each of you. And now, be dear boys." He stroked our heads and rose.

"Take them! Take them!" he cried hastily, and as though in a dream we felt books, skates, and satchels in our hands, and we stood outside in the dimly lighted corridor in amazement, gazing at each other's pale, childish faces, strangely sad and anxious.

Then a groan of agony issued from father's room. "Sophie! Sophie!" Then a sob—heart-breaking weeping. I will never forget it. My skates and books crashed to the floor, and I leaned against the cold wall and cried my little heart out with pain. But Henry grew white to the lips; he would not cry. Was he not a big boy?

Finally Hannah took us into her room. "Now be still, my little Willy. Father is crying for mother; he loved her so dearly. Here, dear, I have something for you; now go and play soldiers in the nursery." And she gave us each a gay soldier's cap. "And I have made some cookies for supper; don't cry!"

But I would hear nothing of soldiers, of cakes, and playthings; and when Henry, already comforted, sat at table and did justice to his favorite dish, I crept into

father's room again. All was quiet in there, and I opened the door softly.

"Who is it?" asked his voice.

"Only I, papa," I stammered.

"Only you, my little one!" was the gentle answer. And then I went up to him, climbed on his knees, and stroked his cheeks with shy tenderness.

"Bring Henry too," said he then, and kissed me. I ran into the nursery. Henry had eaten his fill, but his pretty face wore a sly, confused look as I entered the room, and before him on the table, between large and small nuts, lay my greatest pride, the pretty nut-cracker, broken in two pieces. Mother had given it to me last Christmas, and I had kept it carefully put away in a drawer of my cupboard. Henry's had long since gone the way of all flesh, and now this one!

"It is mine," I stammered, and began to cry.

"The nut was too hard," he murmured in excuse. He tried to comfort me, and fetched his savings bank. "I will buy you another, Willy."

"I want no other," I cried, and picked up the pieces, and carefully put them away; and mourning deeply for the broken nut-cracker, I returned with Henry to father, and silently we sat on his knees.

"Always be very fond of each other," said he, before we went to sleep; "never injure each other." And he clasped our hands together in his right hand. I swallowed my tears courageously, but I have never looked at another nut-cracker.

Gradually our home grew pleasanter: Aunt Bertha and her little daughter lived with us now. She sat in the corner room by the window, where mother had sat: on the stool at her feet crouched little Ursula, with a book of fairy stories, and her long dark braids hung down to the floor.

Now our Christmas holidays were much merrier than formerly, for Ursula was a wild little thing. Henry called her only "little stupid," or worse names. It seemed as though the two were always on hostile terms; why, they probably did not know, themselves. Ursula and I were always the best of friends; in winter, in the corner by the stove, and in summer out in our shady garden. She was an original child, and saw everything through rose-colored spectacles. We had magic grottoes, and palaces of bushes, and high up in the old linden-tree a mountain castle; the girl's dark head peeping out from the thickly interlacing branches made a charming picture. But in the rotten old boat which floated on the quiet pond bordering on our garden, we sailed to discover strange islands. In all that she did there was an unconscious glorification of sober, every-day reality, hers was such a happy, charmingly roguish nature. One could not be angry with her when one discovered that he was the dupe, and her silvery laugh rang out happily at the success of her prank. How such a teasing elf child could belong to the grave, silent Aunt Bertha is a riddle to me, even to-day; she could not understand the strange little being God had given her, and often scolded her for her foolishness.

With the exception of Henry, she was the favorite of the whole house. Even my father's grave face wore a smile when the kobold crept into his room, and, throwing her arms around his neck, cried: "Uncle, the sun shines so brightly in the garden."

"I see it," he would answer jokingly; "some of it has remained clinging to you, Ursula." And then he would put on his cap, and take the child's hand, while she would wander up and down the middle path in the garden, her head bent, as patiently as though she never were a wild Ursula.

Frequent complaints came from the school; she was a talented but flighty child, said her teacher, and the worst was, that she made the other scholars rebellious by her pranks. It was true, they ran after Ursula "like a flock of sheep," declared Henry, very ungallantly. He was a large boy now, went to dancing-school, and had a sweetheart, the chubby-cheeked blonde daughter of a beer and sausage dealer at the market, red and white as an apple, and round and soft as the dumplings which Hannah made for dinner every Sunday.

Henry really treated little Ursula very condescendingly, but in the summer evenings he walked past the shop for hours, greeting perhaps fifty times his sweetheart, who stood in the shop door, blooming as a peony, her blue eyes gazing tenderly at Henry. "You can believe it, Willy," said Ursula, as we sat under the linden-tree in the garden, the sunset lending a rosy tinge to her dark face. "Martha is fearfully stupid, even if she is to be confirmed at Easter. She cannot even read correctly."

"You will never be anything more than a rope-dancer," said Henry, crossly, a short time after, when he wished to study; and Ursula, who sat at the same table with a box full of paper dolls for which she was making the most charming clothes, disturbed the poor fellow every minute by dancing the little figures in front of the lamp, so that their shadows fell on his books. "You are a true gypsy!"

Clap! and Henry received a slap, not very hard but decided, on his cheek. "Why do you study only when the rest of us are through, and want to play?" cried she, crimson with anger. "You ran after that fat Martha all the afternoon, and again after supper, and now you would not be here if it were not raining."

"You are a girl," said he, rubbing his cheek, "otherwise it would go hard with you. But you shall pay for

it." And in an instant he had drawn the slender figure to him, and kissed the little red mouth three times. "That is your punishment ; that is what is done, and to-morrow you will have a mustache."

But Ursula's face changed suddenly ; she buried her face in her apron and began to weep bitterly.

"Do not cry," said I, trying to comfort her, and giving Henry an angry glance. "He did not mean badly." But the child sobbed the more, and ran out of the room like a hunted creature ; we heard her hurrying upstairs where her mother's bedroom was.

"A wild cat," said Henry, and prepared to resume studying.

"Shame on you !" I cried angrily.

He stared at me. "Nonsense ! Can you not understand a joke ?"

But Ursula revenged herself. A few weeks later the great dancing-school ball took place in the parlors of the "Golden Crown," for which ball Martha had a new white frock and a wreath of forget-me-nots. Henry sent her a bouquet by Hannah, two buds from aunt's tea-rose bush, and a few myrtle twigs which Ursula had generously added. He stood before the small mirror in our room for three hours, and his hair never lay smooth enough to suit him ; he cut several pigeon wings, and whistled a few bars of the newest waltz. Yes, Henry was in the seventh heaven.

Before he went away he came into the garden where Ursula and I sat under the linden-tree, listening to the nightingales just beginning their song.

"A pleasant time, Henry !" we cried.

"Thanks ! It is a great pity, Willy, that you do not like dancing ; it is a delightful amusement !" said he. "With Ursula, it is a different matter. She knows that

she would be a wall-flower all the evening," he added teasingly.

She sighed deeply, and nodded her head, but she showed her dimples roguishly as brother Henry walked blissfully toward the festive halls of the "Golden Crown" that May evening. It was quite early when he came home, and hurried to bed; usually such entertainments lasted until morning. He would not answer any of my questions, and the next morning at breakfast looked very depressed and cross. Ursula, in her pink cotton frock, already standing in the hall with her school-books, asked sympathetically what kind of a time he had had, but received merely an angry glance in answer. But at school I learned what a blow poor Henry had treacherously received.

They had danced a dance which the Parisian ballet-master had told them was the latest Paris fashion, and which consisted of all kinds of figures which brought the couples together in turn. The last figure was the crowning glory of the whole proceeding. The ladies bestowed scarfs upon the gentlemen, the gentlemen flowers upon the ladies. How the accident occurred no one could guess, not even Henry himself. As the lion of the evening, in the confusion he had received, among many other scarfs, one which did not quite resemble the others, and as he inspected it more closely, he discovered that it was made of paper, upon which was drawn, with a few pencil strokes, a strikingly life-like portrait of Martha Holzer, with puffy cheeks, and a laughing mouth reaching from ear to ear. Beneath were the lines :

That our sausages and beer are good, by me
All you dear people can certainly see.

At first Henry had sworn revenge, then with an angry look on his face had danced the last figure with his sweet-

heart, and quietly gone home. It was malicious, but very droll ; there was but one opinion as to this in the school. Henry's love, however, had been blighted, for a young heart can bear anything except that "she" is made ridiculous.

Martha's chains of roses were faded, she must seek consolation ; but an icy coldness existed between Ursula and Henry, although she confessed nothing, nor did she betray her ally. She silently listened to several lectures from her mother and our father upon improper behavior, and won back Martha's lost favor completely by offering to let her copy her sums, for arithmetic was Martha's weak point.

This state of affairs lasted all summer, and it was not pleasant. Henry gave us all trouble ; he was in a bad temper, and father sometimes sent for him to come to his room. At such times the tall, handsome fellow always came out with a pale face, and was very quiet for days. In October the unheard-of event occurred : he was not promoted at school, and I entered the same class with him.

"I shall not stay at school any longer," said he to me on the way home. "I am no fool, and I must do something which requires all my strength." At home he threw his books furiously on the table, stood at the window for a while, and then went out into the garden.

My joy at my promotion and good testimonials at school was spoiled. What now, when father learned it? for his plans and hopes were that his sons should study. Then we might hope to win good stipendiaries and take much care from his weary shoulders.

Our house suddenly became very uncomfortable, although a cold autumn wind was blowing outside. Father had a suit in a neighboring town, we others sat around the dinner table in silence, only Ursula made a thousand jokes, and received many a rude word from

Henry in return. But toward evening she came running after me in the garden, white as chalk. "Willy," she cried, wringing her hands, "you must come quickly ! For



heaven's sake, what has Henry done, that your father is so fearfully angry ? ”

We hurried into the house, and up-stairs to father's room. All was still in there now.

“ Let me stay here, Willy, I am so frightened,” pleaded

the girl. "I really will not listen—I will wait on the stairs." And as I turned round, I saw her crouching on the top stair, her frightened eyes fixed upon me.

Father was striding up and down the room. Henry stood at the writing-desk, his curly head bowed. "Willy," began father, pausing in his walk, "we have suddenly arrived at a turning-point in life. I thought that you silently consented to the plans which I and your dear dead mother made for you and your future. Perhaps it was wrong in me to take it for granted that you were both agreed to this, for one career is not suited to every one. We come of a family which has sent its sons for centuries back to the *alma mater*, and which has given to the state a number of excellent doctors and lawyers; there are even names among those of high renown. I confess that I should have been glad to see you join this line honorably. Henry has chosen otherwise, and in him especially this has surprised and saddened me. What do you plan for your future?"

I stared at Henry in bewilderment. Father was forced to repeat his question.

"I wished to study, father," said I.

He nodded; a smile of relief appeared on his face. "Henry turns his back upon books—science; he wishes to become—a sailor," said he.

The secret was out. I grew dizzy. "Henry!" I stammered. He did not move.

"Each man must forge his own fate," continued the old man. "I have tried to dissuade you, Henry. I will not undertake the responsibility of your choice if you do not find your ideal realized. You will remain at school until New Year's. Meanwhile I will take the necessary steps in Hamburg. You must not sail with any captain. As long as I can, I will care for you. Now go."

He held out a hand to each of us. Henry's handsome face twitched, but his eyes shone. Father stroked his blonde head caressingly. "I did not mean badly," said he gently; "it was only my sorrow." Then he quickly turned away.

But down in Aunt Bertha's room, in the twilight, we three sat and listened to Henry. How his eyes shone as he talked as though he had been on many a voyage. His enthusiastic young face called up a fresh, invigorating sea-breeze; dark green transparent waves bore the ship to distant lands, a strange tropical world. Palms, reflected in clear, calm streams, and all the color-splendor of the South in its alluring, mysterious beauty, rose to our minds. We had all grown very quiet, even Aunt Bertha had let her knitting fall from her hands; but Ursula sat there, her head resting in her hands, and with flushed cheeks, she gazed out of the window with longing gaze. Then she began to cry.

"What is the matter, foolish child?" asked her mother. "Why are you crying?"

"Because I am a girl," she cried finally.

Henry laughed aloud. "You would have been a fine man, you will-o'-the-wisp."

"Never mind, Ursula," said I consolingly. But my heart was heavy at my brother's glowing descriptions. "We will stay at home with father."

"Water is an uncertain element," remarked Aunt Bertha. Henry laughed the more.

"Boy," said old Hannah, whose face, as she stood in the doorway, had grown pale at this great news, "you have the sailor fever; you are too hopeful. God grant that you may not be disappointed."

Hannah's words made me gaze sadly at Henry, for she could speak of such matters: her sister was the widow of

a pilot, who had been drowned one stormy night, as Hannah could tell.

A few weeks later, father took Henry to Hamburg. He had found a good ship and kind captain sooner than he had expected. That the trim brig with which Henry was to make his first voyage bore our mother's name, *Sophie*, may have made the old man pleasantly disposed to it ; he called this a good omen.

It was a stormy day early in November. Aunt's and Hannah's eyes were red from weeping. Hannah had cooked the boy's favorite dishes for dinner. "If his mother were alive she would worry herself to a shadow," she said to me, and shook her head.

Ursula was pale, although she had not wept. "I wish I could go with you," she declared ; "and if you find a pearl, Henry—a large, beautiful one—send it to me," she begged quite seriously.

"You probably think that one can catch a pearl on a hook," he said smilingly. She stared at him, but did not laugh at his jesting remark.

When the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter of one it was time. Henry kissed us all in turn, even Ursula. "No quarrelling for the last day," said he gently, patting her cheeks, "and think of me on Christmas Day, for then I shall be just in the middle of the ocean."

None of the women must accompany him to the post-chaise. Henry had forbidden it ; all his classmates were assembled there, and he did not want to have the parting a tearful one. Afterward, as I went home alone in the pale November sunshine, I felt sad and oppressed ; my thoughts followed the jolting coach along the sandy road ; I still saw his handsome face, from which the wind blew back the curly hairs, as he waved his cap in farewell, while his expression was that of joyful expectation.

“He sent another good-by,” I said to aunt and Ursula, and then went to the room which until now we had occupied together, and suddenly the hot tears rushed to my eyes, half in mourning for the departing one, half with



longing that I, too, might go out in to the wide world. I was not the only sad one ; we all missed him.

As I stood by the window in my room, gazing up at the bright stars, I tried to imagine a voyage over the endless ocean. Perhaps now he, too, stood and gazed up at the

stars, perhaps the sound of the Christmas chimes at home rang in his ears, and made him clasp his hands reverently, and his lips recite the Christmas collect, and a prayer for us at home.

I worked my way through the last classes at school with iron industry. When Ursula was confirmed, I took my final examination ; I had seen the child every day, and yet on Palm Sunday she seemed strangely unfamiliar to me, surprisingly lovely. Had I then, absorbed in my studies, failed to remark how tall and slender she had become, or was it the plain black gown that she wore, which made her appear so young-ladyfied ? I stared at her as though in a dream.

She had cried in church, she had clung to father's neck, and thanked him again and again for all that she had enjoyed in his house, under his protection.

"I have only thanks to give," the old man had replied. "Would it not have been all too lonely without you, now that Willy, too, leaves his father's house ?" And he gave me a proud glance which made my heart beat with joy, for in a few days I was to go to Halle, where father had once studied law.

The day before, we wandered once more through the garden, Ursula and I. She had laid her hand on my shoulder, and thus we sought our favorite spot for the last time.

"When you come home for your vacations," she said, "I hope we will all be here together ; Henry will come—he wrote that he would be in Hamburg again in the autumn."

"God grant it !" I said heartily. I paused under the linden-tree, for Ursula stooped to the ground. There stood a willow coop, under which was a little hen, clucking and calling to her tiny yellow chickens, who ran in and

out of the opening of the coop ; and the sunbeams fell through the new green leaves of the linden, and formed a golden halo around the dark, girlish head.

"They are mine, all mine, Willy," she cried ; "I raised them myself, and this morning I carried them out here in the sunshine, so that they might enjoy their young lives. Is it not charming, such a gay little nursery?" She raised her head and gazed at me with her brown eyes most happily. I have never forgotten this picture—this glance.

"Since when have you been such a little house-wife, Ursula?" I asked, merely for the sake of saying something.

She laughed and tapped her forehead. "You goose!" said she, with a pout. "I do not know why, but for the last half-year you have been like a deaf-mute, always at your stupid old books. And when one spoke to you, you did not answer, or started as though wakened from a deep sleep. You look like one who has starved for seven months, and—I do not like you as you are now, Willy."

"Oh, it will all be different now," said I consolingly ; "the hard examinations, you know."

"Do not be vexed, Willy," she cried, coming close to me. "You are so good, they all say ; you have always been much too good and sensible. Please do something foolish for once, so that one need not stand in such awe of you."

She really gazed at me compassionately, and then we both laughed. "Oh, Ursula, has such a thing ever been heard of?" said I. "You beg, with wringing of hands and entreaties, your own cousin to do something foolish. I almost believe that Henry is right, and that you have gypsy blood in your veins."

"I do not know," she replied thoughtfully, "but at times my own thoughts frighten me—they are so wild, as



though they were not my own ; I cannot catch nor hold them—but it is probably so with every one—eh ? ”

“ Give me a keepsake, Ursula,” I asked, as I stood before her the next day, ready for the journey. We were all in the room of her mother, who was occupied elsewhere.

“ Do you need one to remember me by ? ” said she teasingly.

“ You know that better than I, Ursula ! ”

“ Well then, come here ! ” She stood before her sewing-table, and began to rummage in the drawers as though seeking something. The slender fingers overturned everything ; mere childish trifles were there, ribbons and pictures, needle-books and all sorts of rubbish. “ I have nothing,” said she at length. “ I must give you something else.” Suddenly I saw the two dimples in her cheeks deepen, then I felt a pair of soft arms around my neck, and her fresh lips on mine. “ There ! ” said she, and quick as lightning drew her little hand over her mouth, “ do not forget me, and come home well.”

But I stood there flushing crimson, and stared at her. And I sat in the coach as though in a dream, driving away in the laughing spring-time ; everywhere were blooming fruit-trees, young foliage, the song of birds, and intoxicating fragrance. And I leaned out of the carriage and gazed back at the city ; never had it seemed so dear, so lovely to me as now, when I knew what these old walls contained for me.

I was never a man driven to extravagances by youthful enthusiasm ; there was always something which restrained me, even in the gayest society, so that I could not join in the others’ wild frolics. To be sure, I was not Master Urban’s dullest pupil ; I have passed the summer nights occasionally with others at a gay tavern, and joined in various escapades of my comrades, but when the fun was

most furious I would become quiet and turn away—I could not help it, this was my nature.

So there I was happiest in my own den, alone. There hung over my bed a silhouette of my father, and a pretty water-color sketch of our house from the garden side; in the foreground could be seen a few branches of the linden-tree, so that it seemed framed in by the gnarled limbs. Ursula had painted it. She had tried to paint two figures on the garden path, representing us brothers, but only Henry's was complete—a tiny figure in a blue jacket and large hat. The other she had painted out, and had changed it to herself, because, as she said, she did not succeed with my likeness.

I was happy when I wrote home or to Henry, and my joy was still greater when the postman brought me a letter from home. Besides, I was more industrious than is usual at the beginning of our course. I knew that father waited with the impatience of a weary, exhausted man, who longs for rest, to turn his practice over to me, so I seldom missed a lecture. I seemed old and pedantic to myself in comparison with the others. I asked myself how it would be to circle through the crowd to the sound of music, and with a pretty girl for partner, exhilarated with youth and wine. And in the next moment it seemed to me shallow and distasteful, and secretly I would press my hand to my heart, where rested a rustling paper, the only letter which Ursula had written me, on the first birthday I had ever spent away from my father's house. A pair of deep dark eyes gazed at me, and I felt a pair of soft girlish lips on mine, and I was happy, happier than all my gay comrades.

But nothing came of the autumn vacation, to which I had looked forward with such anticipated delight. Two days before the beginning of the holidays I was taken ill with fever, and when all hurried from the sultry old city,

I lay on a sick-bed in pain and despair, and only rose from it when the winter semester began. At home they had not known how ill I had been ; I had written something about a lame foot. It was not as easy to travel then as nowadays, and who could have come to nurse me ? Aunt Bertha



was the only one, but her delicate health would have prevented her. And how could she have stayed in my little student's room ?

They had not written from home for a long time, and yet I thought of them every day, as I sat by the window in the autumn sunlight, a convalescent. Henry was surely at

home now. What accounts of his voyage he would give, and was he content with his chosen calling? These questions filled me with longing. I even thought of taking a few days' leave, when a letter arrived.

It was from father. "How we have missed you, Willy," he wrote, "you can well guess, and how your foot spoiled our pleasure I need not tell you. Henry was here for two weeks, and nothing was lacking for our happiness but you. Thank God! he is well, and content with his calling. A great load was taken from off my mind by this. The boy has grown large and tall, burned by wind and storm, and he has tales to tell of both good and evil. For the present he will remain in Hamburg to take his examination, and, if God pleases, you will meet in your father's house at Christmas.

"He almost surprised you in Halle; what upset his plans I really cannot tell. But when you come you will find on the desk in your room all sorts of things which he brought you. We have curiosities in the house now: on my writing-desk stands a little Indian idol, grimacing terribly. The ladies of our household wear genuine East Indian silk shawls, which he brought from Hong-Kong—Ursula's interwoven with gold. All send their love to you, and hope that you will soon be well. At Christmas I hope to press you to my heart.

"Your loving father,

"H. NORDMANN."

"Drink a glass of the wine, sent you to-day, occasionally, to strengthen yourself," was added in a postscript.

Suddenly I felt out of temper, although I knew not why. I ascribed it to irritability from my long illness, and folded the letter with a sigh. As soon as I could, I set to work again—more than was good for me; and so it happened that, when I stood before my mirror, a week before Christ-

mas, ready for travelling, a pale, sunken face gazed back at me, and Ursula's words flashed to my mind : " You look as though you had been starved for seven months."

But it was delightful to drive toward home in the old yellow coach ; it snowed a little, and the brilliant covering looked charmingly on the dark green branches of the fir-trees. There was a gay assemblage in the coach—students going home to celebrate the holidays—and we stopped at every tavern. I let them carry on, and watched with secret joy the travelling-bag in the rack above me ; there were various articles in there for the Christmas-tree, most of them for Ursula. For days I had wandered through the shops, and I never found anything that seemed good enough to place in the little hand, until one day I found it in the shape of a book—" *Hannah and the Little Chicken.*" As I read the title I was suddenly reminded of the little scene with the chickens under the linden-tree, and as I read the charming tale, I thought it a fitting present for her. " My dear Ursula, for Christmas," I wrote in it.

They did not know that I was to arrive to-day. With winged steps I hurried through the well-known streets ; there lay the dear old house in the bright winter sunlight. I felt no weariness from my night's journey, but my heart beat rapidly. In the open doorway stood a tall girlish form.

" Why, Willy ! " cried Ursula's clear voice in amazement, and then she held out both hands, and I gazed at the dark, beautiful face.

" Where do you come from to-day ? " she cried. " Oh, how glad your father will be ! He has spoken of nothing else for days. But," and she stood still as she had turned toward the stairs, " how you look, Willy ! You were very ill—admit it." And the dark eyes gazed at me

in sisterly compassion. "That will grieve your father," she added.

"But you, too, have changed, Ursula," I replied. "You have grown half a head taller, and so——"

"Oh, never mind," said she, her face slowly flushing



delicately, "do not keep your father waiting any longer ; go up-stairs quickly ; afterward you will come to mother's room, will you not ?" And she hurried down-stairs lightly as a bird.

"One can see, Willy," said father, after the heartiest greeting, "we lawyers have not chosen the healthiest

profession. You should have seen Henry, and what an appetite the boy has."

When I went down to Aunt Bertha's room she said almost the same to me. "But that is no matter, Willy," she added consolingly. "You know what you have. I should not like to have such an uncertain element beneath me as Henry has; were he my child, I should have worried myself to death long ago."

But Ursula sat quietly beside her sewing-table and embroidered a cap for father. Suddenly my eyes rested on a little shawl that she had arranged daintily over her shoulders; it was white, interwoven with gold threads, and was very becoming to her brunette beauty.

She noticed it. "Henry brought me this," said she, "and this pink coral, and the shells on mother's cupboard." And as I came nearer I discovered a picture, hanging directly opposite Ursula's chair, representing a ship under full sail, with flags floating, surrounded by dark green waves. "That is the *Sophie*, with which Henry made his first voyage," declared Ursula. "I am only keeping the picture."

"You hung it there?" I asked involuntarily.

"Yes," she replied. "I am very fond of it, Willy—it looks so gay, that ship; it makes one's heart swell to look at it."

Everywhere I looked were traces of Henry—even in the kitchen. "Dear Willy, see what the boy bought me." And Hannah radiantly showed me a couple of Chinese cups with grotesque figures upon them. "But it is no right life, Willy," she added; "a man should stay where he is born: such a vagabond life is wrong. What kind of a husband does such a man make? He will never find a wife; the sea will be his bride. You will do better, my boy."

Henry was not expected until Christmas Eve, and meanwhile I helped Ursula in her preparations for the festive day, as far as an awkward student could. I fastened the tree to its supports, and all sorts of sugar trifles to gay ribbons, and I did errands for her and looked up tardy workmen. She now had the reins of housekeeping in her own hands, for Aunt Bertha was far from well, and for the greater part sat in her arm-chair by the window. The girl flitted about on her light feet unweariedly, and as she had formerly lent an unconscious tinge of poetry to her play, she now did the same with her every-day household duties, and with the same roguish show of her dimples. But she pleased me best when she sat by the window, reading after dinner. "This is necessary, Willy," she said once excusingly, with a glance at her mother. "I cannot give this up ; it does me good and refreshes me ; one forgets one's narrow routine of duties, and afterward feels all the happier when performing these duties."

"What are you reading, Ursula ?" I asked once, when she seemed too much absorbed, and I had borne her silence like a martyr.

"Richter's Travels by Land and Sea," she replied, and lowered her eyes to the book again. And I had thought it a love-story.

Two days before Christmas, as she went toward the storeroom with her bunch of keys, she motioned to me. "Willy, come and see something beautiful."

I entered this large, stone-floored room ; everything there looked as usual, and still smelled of lavender, as it had when mother was alive, and I had crept after her as a little boy, for she had kept the Christmas presents here. The girl opened a painted chest, and let me look in.

"What is that ?" I asked, and looked at a white filmy

gown with pale blue ribbons, and on top of the gown a dainty wreath of roses.



She looked at me, blushing and radiant. "My ball-dress which mother gave me for Christmas."

"Your ball-dress, Ursula! I always thought that you were not fond of dancing."

She laughed. "Oh, you do not know how delightful it

is. Only think, I can dance without ever having learned, and even 'very well,' as Henry said, when he was here in the autumn. We and a few acquaintances went on a picnic to Büstrow, to the harvest-home, and danced under the oaks ; it was so lovely. You will come with us, will you not?" she asked then. "The day after Christmas there is a ball at the 'Golden Crown'—I am so glad, and Henry too."

"I cannot dance, Ursula."

"Oh, do not be tiresome, Willy!" she cried. "Whoever is young can dance ; we will try it—it is inborn in every one to dance." And she sprang past me with a few polka steps, and the bunch of keys clinked in time.

I followed her, heard her cry, as she passed father's door : "Uncle, are you warm enough? Your breakfast will be up in a moment." Then I heard her steps on the stairs, and her voice rang out in the kitchen, and my mind became still more confused with joy and timidity.

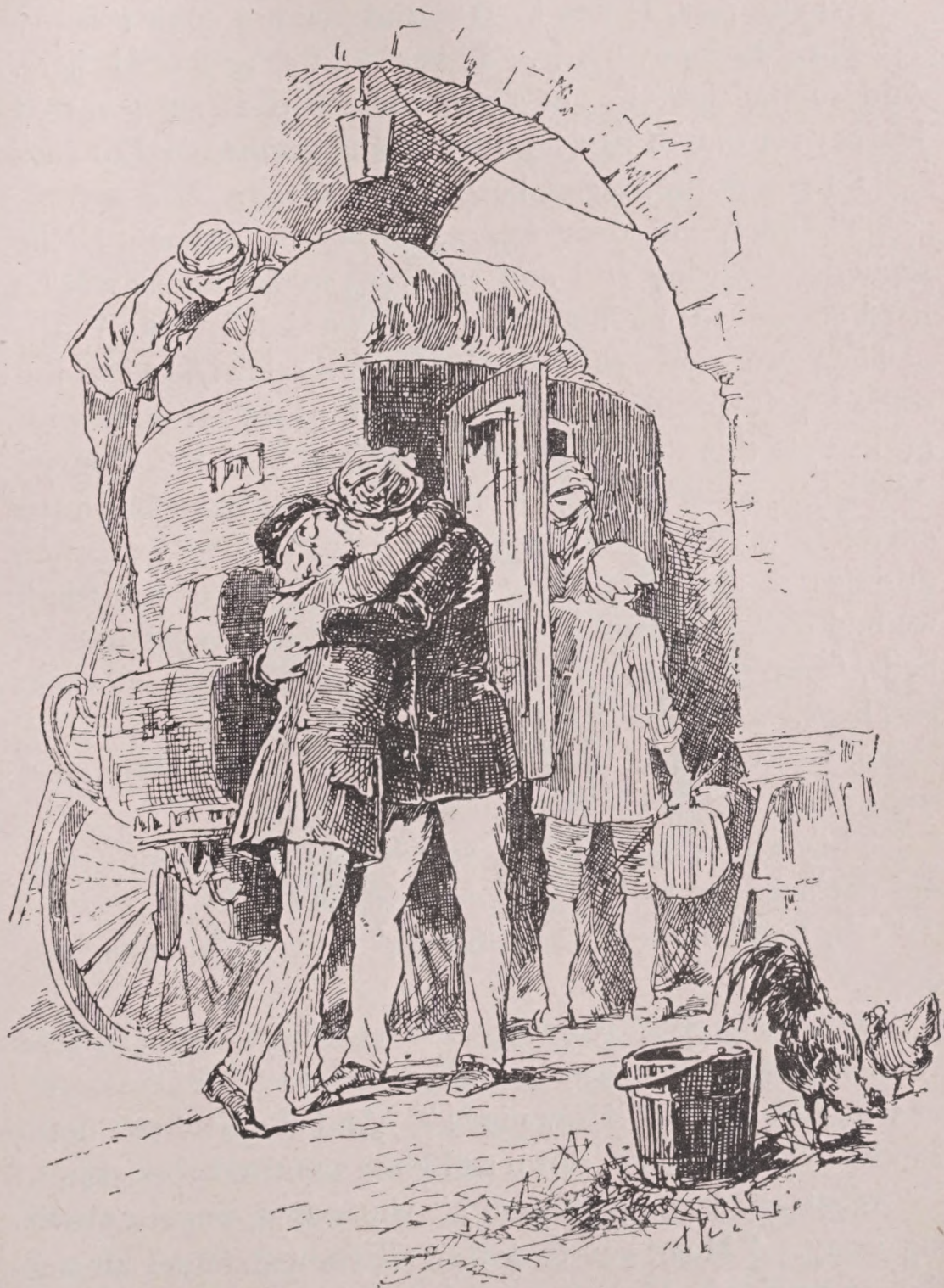
I met Henry at the post-station the next day. It was almost dark when the heavy coach rolled through the stone gateway. My heart beat almost to bursting. How long it was since we had seen each other! Then the vehicle stopped, and a tall, broad-shouldered man sprang out first of all ; by the last rays of light I saw a handsome, bearded face and two honest blue eyes. "Henry!" I cried, and in the next moment we were clasped in each other's arms.

"Boy, boy, how long it is since I have seen you! But what a little fellow you have remained," and he gazed at me attentively. "All well on board?"

"Yes, Henry, except aunt. But come quickly. We will have a happy Christmas Eve to-night. Father did not come, because he had some business, and Ursula too."

"First the ballast, Willy. Hey!" he cried to a

man, who ran up to offer his services. "This is mine," and he pointed to his chest. "I should like to have it



soon ; there are things in it for this evening. To Mr. Nordmann's, Long Street." And then we walked down

the street together, and he spoke of this and that, and how he had wanted to run down to Halle to see me.

“What a pity, Henry! Why did you not come?”

“Pure laziness, Willy. I was firmly anchored here. And such a tight box of a post-chaise—it is an accursed journey for one of us who has become accustomed to air.”

“So you do not regret becoming a sailor?”

“Thunder, my dear fellow, not for a moment!” he replied. “Sitting still and studying in Hamburg will be hard enough for me now; I wish it was behind me.”

Then we were silent. He walked slowly, with the rolling gait peculiar to seamen. I gazed at him with pride. So this stately, broad-shouldered man was Henry! And as we walked along side by side, the bells began to chime from all the towers of the city, as they had once during our childhood. And a day occurred to me when we had walked home hand in hand to this same peal of bells, from St. Mary’s Churchyard, a pair of little, motherless boys.

All was quiet in the hall. “Oho!” said Henry, and walked straight to the kitchen door.

“They will be up-stairs,” I ventured to interpose; “they did not hear the bell: we came quickly.”

“Oh, I will inspect the caboose,” said he, opening the door.

“Henry!” cried Ursula, who stood at the spotless kitchen table. Just as she had called me “Willy!”—or was it different? “How nice!” And she held out both hands, but Henry bent down suddenly and tried to kiss her.

“What are you thinking of?” she asked, hastily drawing away. “Have you forgotten all your manners among the mermaids? Hurry, your father is waiting up-stairs, and later I will come and light the tree; afterward you shall have something to eat, you must be hungry.”

I was vexed with him. "You still tease her as you did when she was a child," I said; "she is a grown girl: you will never be good friends if you go about it in that way."

He whistled softly to himself at my words of reproof, but he also smiled; then with a few leaps he was up-stairs, in my father's room, and clasped to his breast.

So we were all once more together around the lighted



tree in the drawing-room. I had secretly laid the book at Ursula's place, with several other trifles: there was admiring, inspecting, teasing, and laughing, and Ursula played all kinds of tricks with her gifts.

She gave me a tobacco pouch of green silk, adorned with gold beads, but first I had to unwrap it from a hundred wrappings. For Hannah, there was a box containing a wadded silk hood, and the faithful old soul tried in vain to guess who could have given it to her. The shabby

slippers had disappeared from beside the stove in father's room, and two beautifully embroidered new ones, harnessed like horses, with red ribbons, to a bootjack, paraded in their place. Aunt Bertha found a basket of eggs at her place, but when she gazed at them more closely, she found that they were merely balls of wool, in the shape of eggs. Only Henry received a note-book, and as he opened it, I saw his handsome face become serious; and when I drew nearer, I saw our home daintily painted on the silk cover, and underneath the words:

“Far from your native land, I at home think of thee.”

But at the same moment, Ursula held a little brooch in her hand, in which was set a beautiful pearl. “A pearl!” she cried joyfully; “is that a real pearl?”

“Oh, you should not give each other such expensive presents,” said Aunt Bertha reprovingly: she looked quite surprised.

Henry laughed. “Oh, I can bear that expense,” said he.

As we sat at table, a little hand clasped mine. “Many thanks, Willy, for the beautiful book; when you are gone, I will read it.” I nodded silently, and Ursula and Henry were even more quiet; the mirth which we had anticipated was not forthcoming.

The day after Christmas, in the afternoon, I sat downstairs with my aunt and cousin. Henry had gone out to visit old friends. It was a cold, wet, disagreeable day. Ursula had ribbons and flowers around her, and was sewing little rosettes on a small pair of dancing-shoes. Two fresh roses, which Henry had given her, stood in a glass of water. But Aunt Bertha leaned back in her arm-chair, pale and sad. Had not Ursula smiled radiantly, the room would have been gloomy.

“Are you really so happy?” I asked. She nodded, and clapped the soles of the slippers together.

“Well, I have ordered a carriage, Ursula,” said Henry, entering the room at this moment.

“Oh!” cried she joyfully.

“Do not spoil her so,” said Aunt Bertha, and again her face wore a sad look.

In the evening the so-called bridal carriage stopped before our door, and a light white form slipped in, and was received with laughter; the light of Hannah’s lantern fell on two fresh girlish faces under wreaths of flowers, their eyes full of expectancy, while a dignified matron called: “I will take good care of Ursula, Hannah!” Henry and I walked silently after the carriage, we also being in gala attire.

It was not two hours later that I found myself in the street again. My head was burning, but otherwise I was cold, and my heart ached—was it with fierce jealousy? And then I called myself a fool. I had leaned against the wall for two hours and had followed her with my eyes as she danced past me, her cheeks rosy, wholly absorbed in her pleasure. I would have liked to tear her from her partner’s arms; it seemed as though my saint were desecrated.

First she had danced with Henry. He was my brother. I did not grudge him the dance, and yet——

I opened our door softly and was about to cross the hall, when Aunt Bertha’s door opened and she stood on the threshold.

“Willy,” said she wearily, like one mortally ill, “one moment, I have something to say to you.”

As I entered the room she sank into a chair exhausted, and her face had grown deathly pale.

“You are ill, aunt,” said I, frightened. “I will call Hannah.”

“No, not yet, Willy. Yes, I have been miserable for a long time, and to-day more than ever; I must tell you

something that makes me uneasy and will not let me die in peace—Ursula—Willy——”

“Aunt, she is in my father’s house,” said I consolingly.



“Your father is old and—what then?” she asked. And after a while: “You are so calm, Willy, so sensible, although still so young—I lay the care for her future in your

hands." And as I did not answer, she turned her dim eyes upon me. "Have I then been mistaken, Willy?"

"No, aunt, you have not been mistaken," said I firmly.

She held out her hand to me. "I thank you!" she whispered. "It is worse with me than you think; call Hannah—Ursula, my poor little Ursula!"

I started up and rushed out to fetch the maid, and then out into the street in the rain and wind to summon the child to her mother's death-bed. It was in the midst of a dance as I stood before her, and took her hand. She had grown pale as the gown she wore. "Come, Ursula," I said gently, "I will take you home."

She followed me unresistingly; she must have read from my face that something terrible had made me disturb her pleasure. I wrapped her in her cloak, drew the overshoes on her little feet, and laid the scarf over her hair. She asked no questions, she did not even speak; I could scarcely keep up with her in the street. A few feet away from the house, she paused: "My mother, Willy; it is my mother."

And as I was silent, it seemed as though her strength failed, and she leaned heavily against me; I picked her up and carried her across the threshold, and into her mother's room. Hannah knelt before the arm-chair, sobbing; now she made room for the daughter, and the hand of the dying woman was laid upon the rose-crowned head of the young girl.

"Willy—Ursula!" said she, making a great effort. "Willy—" that was her last word.

When Henry arrived, breathless, half an hour later, Ursula, still in her white gown, knelt beside the dead woman, her hands clinched in her dark hair, without a tear, without a complaint.

Time passes even on such days, slowly and wearily in

the present, but quickly in remembrance of it. When I thought of home, I saw a slender figure in mourning garb walking in the garden, and a grave young face from which laughter seemed banished forever, and I plunged over head and ears into work, for my longing threatened to gain the upper hand.

Since that night I had known that I loved Ursula ; and that I had promised the dying mother to protect her was a sweet and sacred permission to me to do so.

I had been at home but once since that time. Meanwhile I had studied in Göttingen and Bonn ; now I returned an advocate, to plead in the courts of my native city. I knew that nothing of importance had occurred at home. Ursula and father lived there quietly. Henry was sailing on distant seas, as captain ; he had not been home for a long time.

This time father met me as I alighted from the post-chaise, and Ursula stood beside him, in her light summer gown. She had left off her mourning, but her face still wore a look of sadness. She walked ahead of father and me down the narrow street. "She is lonely with such an old man as I," said father ; "now that you are home, it will be better, Willy."

But there was no change in the girl. As though all her joy in life had been killed that sad evening, she went about her work quietly ; only at times she seemed to awaken, and then her cheeks burned like fire, and her bosom heaved convulsively, but she made no complaint, and declared that nothing ailed her.

It was on a sunny spring day that I saw her walking in the garden, and followed her half anxiously, half filled with rapture. She sat under the linden-tree when I found her, and when she saw me coming she moved to make room for me beside her, as she had done when a child. I



paused before her ; she had leaned her head against the trunk of the tree, and gazed wearily across the quiet lake, into the distance.

“ Ursula,” I began, “ what has become of your happiness ? ”

She turned abruptly and looked at me. “ Do you not know ? ” she asked.

“ Yes, Ursula. It was a hard blow for you when your mother was taken from you, but you are so young.”

She bowed her head and was silent. Her face wore an unhappy look. “ I know,” she whispered, “ what mother meant in the hour of her death—you come to remind me of it, Willy.”

“ Ursula ! ” She looked at me again, and I turned cold. “ Be calm, Ursula,” said I, “ and let us speak of something else.” But she buried her face in her hands and began to sob bitterly.

“ I cannot help it,” she burst out.

“ No, Ursula, you cannot help it,” I repeated.

So we sat beside each other in silence for some time ; the sun set in a crimson glory, and then a deeply flushed girl’s face turned to me with sweet confusion.

“ You are so kind and good, Willy, and he is your brother.” And before I could prevent it, she fell on her knees in front of me, and the eyes which gazed up at me were filled with their old sweet light. “ I have loved him, Willy, since my childhood. Have you never noticed it ? On the evening—the evening, you know, when mother died—he told me as we danced together, Willy——”

I nodded. “ Stand up, Ursula ! ” said I, raising her. Then suddenly she lay on my breast, her slender arms around my neck, and her soft cheek rested against mine.

“ Willy ! ” she sobbed. And again the crimson sunset glow lit up her brown hair, and I held her clasped in

my arms, as I had dreamed that I would once hold her that day—every day—even an hour before—and yet I was sad unto death.

How gladly I would have wandered out of my father's house—out of the city, at that time ! Those were hard days, tormenting days, that I passed in her nearness. I saw the rosy light return to her cheeks in expectation of her happiness ; I saw her dimpling smile, and in the morning I heard her step on the stairs, always at the time when the postman could be expected ; and I saw her glad expression when she hurried to her room after receiving a letter. But I also saw her turn pale if this letter did not arrive at the expected time, and on stormy evenings she leaned against the window-frame and listened to the raging storm. “Willy, Willy, do you hear the wind ?” and her pale face pained me as much as when, flushing rosily, she read aloud to me some portion of his letter and gave me a message from her Henry. On the calendar in the dining-room I found various signs ; the Christmas week she had marked with red, and I knew that she expected him then, that then she would become his forever.

“God help them !” said Hannah, “where will they find a pastor to marry them ? No good will come of it—no house, no home.” And the old soul slyly glanced sadly at me. She had probably noticed that I had been robbed of a dear hope.

My father said nothing : he merely patted me on the shoulder and gazed in my eyes questioningly, when he received Henry's letter asking for his father's consent to his marriage with Ursula. But, in accordance with his duty and conscientious scruples, he talked gravely to the girl of this marriage. I do not know what he said, but I heard that she opposed all objections with a merry laugh.

Christmas Eve, a young couple stood near the lighted

tree, and gazed at the burning candles ; his arm was around her, and her head rested on his shoulder, while the myrtle wreath still rested on her dark hair. They had been married that afternoon, in the church whose old tower could be seen from our garden, and father and I had stood near them at the altar. Hannah sat in the first pew, shedding bitter tears. They were to leave us the next morning very early ; the ship sailed on the 27th.

We took leave of each other that evening ; the post left the city at four o'clock in the morning. Father, ill and weary, had retired to rest early.

"God bless you !" said I now, as the candles on the tree had burned down, and we had become silent. "Good-by, Henry ! Good-by, Ursula !"

Then once more in my life I felt Ursula's arms around my neck ; she shed tears, and her lips pressed mine as they had before. But she did not say a word, and these were tears of happiness.

"Good-by, brother !" said Henry softly, and then I stood in my dark, lonely room, and gazed out across the snowy garden at the old linden. It seemed to me that it stretched out its bare branches despairingly in the cold winter air, as though to hold something which was trying to flee from it, and yet which the old tree had no power to grasp because it was fast rooted to its native soil. Unconsciously man transfers his moods to inanimate objects.

Gradually the house became quiet. I heard Ursula's door open softly, and Hannah going up-stairs, but I still stood at the window. It was late when I threw myself upon my bed, and when I awoke it was day, a bright, sunny, winter day, and the bells were ringing for service.

"They left another good-by for you," said old Hannah, as she brought me my breakfast, and turned away with a sob.

So they went away man and wife, with happy confidence in a blissful future. She saw the palms waving on the other side of the world, and on the frail bark, in the wind and storm, she laughed, because her Henry stood on the commander's deck. They passed happy days between water and sky, the two, so her letters reported.

But then he remained away a long, long time ; it was to



be his last voyage before he settled down in the pretty little house at Cuxhafen—he never returned.

And one day a still beautiful woman, in widow's dress, entered my solitary house.

“Willy,” said she, laying the hand of a slender boy, with Henry's blond curls and his mother's dark eyes, in mine, “he has no father now, and I do not want to send him among strangers. Will you not keep him here with you ?”

“And you, too, Ursula,” said I. “Come back to the old home ; it is yours and mine.”

She shook her head. "Let me stay there. I can see the ocean from my window ; I have been so fond of it."

So she sat by her room window in the little house in Cuxhafen for a long time. I visited her once, and then I



knew why Ursula lived here ; there was a peculiar charm to the place. When she died, Willy brought me a last greeting from her, and a little book, "Hannah and the Little Chicken."

This was Ursula, the dream of my youth.

I have grown old, have experienced much joy and misery, as every one does on this earth, but I remained solitary. Yes, it was very firmly rooted, this first love.

When my grief for the dead became milder, my youth was gone. But this lock of hair—this long, fine lock of woman's hair—I will put back in the old book ; the boy shall have it when he returns from the East Indies, for, of course, he too is a sailor.

The last drops in the glass I drink to you, Henry, and you, Ursula, who have come to visit the lonely man on this Christmas Eve. That is a beautiful saying which compares memory to a paradise from which no one can drive us.





VI.

DANGEROUS GROUND.

So here I am again in a low room of the old inn of the "Red Trout," the first hotel of the little Thuringian town; and I gaze down the deserted, well-known street, with its wretched paving and rows of old, one-storied houses, which have received a fresh coat of paint in honor of the Whitsuntide festivities. I see the fountain with its three perpetually flowing streams of crystal-clear water; the little iron knight on the top of the plain pillar from which these streams issue is St. Martin, the special patron saint of the little town. Nothing is changed here, and the linden-tree in front of the inn is covered with just such young green leaves to-day as when I alighted from the extra post, and beneath the branches of the venerable tree set foot for the first time upon Borndorf soil.

At each side of the massive front door I noticed May-poles, decked with pink streamers, and also, as at that time, fastened upon the time-blackened door a red theatre poster. Had not, instead of the old, white-haired innkeeper, a fresh young man received me with new-fashioned politeness, I could have fancied that it was still Whitsun-eve of the year 1867, which has long, long ago been forgotten by most people, but not by me, and not by one other.

I turn, for the rosy-cheeked maid has entered the room, and asks whether madame wishes anything—perhaps some coffee, and the cake has just come from the bakery.

“No, I thank you. But you may take this note to the parsonage for me, will you, child? As soon as possible. Tell the pastor’s wife not to come here. I am more active than she, and will only make a few changes in my dress, and then come. I only send the note so as not to startle her.”

The pretty girl stares at me with some confusion as she takes the note from my hand. “Madame means Mrs. Steinkopf?” she then asks.

“Yes, of course. But please give me back the note; I have changed my mind. Simply ask Miss Martha to come here if she has time.”

“A *Miss*?” asks the girl.

“Yes, Miss Steinkopf.”

“There is no young lady at the parsonage.”

“What do you say? You are probably not a native of Borndorf?”

“No, madame; but I have been at service here in the ‘Trout’ for a year, and know every one in Borndorf. No, there is no young lady at the parsonage.”

“Pray send the host to me,” I say vexedly, and she disappears.

The extremely polite young man, who wears his greasy yellow hair arranged like the head-waiter of some first-class Berlin hotel, which does not seem at all suited to the little “Red Trout” inn, hurries into the room, and asks how he can serve the “gracious lady.”

“I cannot make myself understood by your maid,” I say. “I wish a message sent to the parsonage, asking Miss Martha Steinkopf to come to see me as soon as possible.”

“The gracious lady’s command is unfortunately impossible to execute—for—h’m——”

“Is the young lady married?” I ask in astonishment.

“The gracious lady must pardon me—h’m—is the gracious lady related to the pastor? Not? Or intimately acquainted?—h’m——”

“But, good heavens, pray speak!” I cry irritably. “Is she dead? No? Well, no one can disappear in this little town, and she is quite too large to have been stolen by gypsies.”

“Pardon me, gracious lady; Miss Martha Steinkopf—but that is really not her name—a year or so ago—ran away with—simply ran away.”

I motion to him to be silent. “Thank you, sir; I will learn particulars at the parsonage myself. Thanks!”

“And Mrs. Steinkopf—will the gracious lady permit me to make one more remark?—has fallen into a state of melancholia over it. She can scarcely speak a word, and——”

“Thank you!” I interrupted him decidedly. “Send me some coffee.”

He stared at me in surprise and left the room.

All the sunshine suddenly has left the room, and the air is close and oppressive—or does it only seem so? I sit in the arm-chair and stare at the green carpet, horrified at what I have heard, but can come to no conclusion. The portraits over the sofa, of the reigning prince and his wife, dance before my eyes, and old Kaiser Wilhelm shakes his head. Good heavens! I cannot comprehend it—my Elizabeth a victim to melancholia! The quiet, gentle creature, the dear, faithful friend of my girlhood! And the child a run-away!

I had not seen Elizabeth for four years. At that time she had been at a little Holstein summer resort on our

coast, with her husband and child, and what a charming girl this child had grown into ! I had passed many happy hours with them ; later, letters had passed between us occasionally, but then I was negligent ; long journeys had prevented me from resuming my old correspondence, which had become so dear to me. I had indeed written once, and received no answer, and so all outward signs of our old friendship had ceased. But when I had settled again in Rächnitz, one day the thought of surprising Elizabeth, of passing Whitsuntide in her house once more, as formerly I had so often done, presented itself to my mind so alluringly that I resolved to carry it out—and now ?

One tear after another fell from my eyes ; but one thing was clear to me, I could not meet her thus. I would leave the place to-morrow, after a talk with her husband, whom I resolved to ask to call upon me as soon as service was over, that I might learn something more definite.

Meanwhile the sky had become overcast, and distant mutterings of thunder announced a storm. Soon it began to rain, or more than that, it poured in torrents. Finally the maid brings me my coffee, together with the weekly paper. There are moments when one does not realize violent shocks, when one can act as though nothing terrible had happened. I calmly drink my cup of coffee, and sitting by the window, I read in the paper :

Sunday, June 5th,
At the Court Theatre of Borndorf,
Grand Representation for the Benefit of the
Director of the Theatre, Mr. Wm. Kranowsky.

FAUST :
A Tragedy.

Strange ! When I was here for the first time on that May day in 1867, "Faust" was also given, I think, and I

am almost stunned by the flood of recollections which rushes upon me. The rain falls incessantly, the maid has come into the room again, and I stare out at the storm.

“Does madame wish theatre tickets? To-morrow is the director’s benefit. Pray do, madame,” says the girl. “I think the troupe have fared badly. One of them sits and cries continually; since she has come here she has not once left her room except one evening. She is always up there,” she pointed towards the ceiling; “and yesterday she screamed so that I could hear her down-stairs, and when I went up-stairs, she was at the director’s feet, begging him to do something, and he was angry, oh, so angry!”

All this rings in my ears, but I scarcely understand it. I take out six marks and receive a number of red bills for them. The girl thanks me as though I had given her something, and leaves the room. I take up the paper again. The name of the actress is not printed after “Margaret,” in place of it are three stars. At the foot of the bill is printed: “Margaret; Miss Korinska, engaged at the royal theatre, and with this troupe for a short time only.”

I must have heard the name Korinska! Then I realize that I am staring up at the ceiling; up there, yes, I think it was the very room where years ago—— Exerting all my powers I strive to recall clearly the events of that time, which are so confused with the present; and as I gaze out into the twilight and listen to the falling rain, while the room is filled with delicious fragrance of flowers, the past suddenly rises clearly before me.

Whitsuntide, 1867. At last I was able to accept Elizabeth’s invitation. I did so all the more gladly since I knew that she needed comforting and diverting as much as fresh air and nourishment. Our acquaintance dated

from our boarding-school days; she, a quiet, tender nature, became tenderly attached to the wild girl from the North-Sea region. Our views were as different as our natures. She inclined to sentimentality, easily wounded, coming of a very pious family, knew no higher ambition than to become a deaconess, if possible of a child's hospital, for she loved children dearly, especially those who were delicate, and must always be carefully guarded and tended; while my ambition was to marry the owner of some great estate. I thought it would be delightful to be at the head of a fine house, to rule over maids and servants, to govern my wild children, and ride over the fields at my husband's side, inspecting the state of the crops, which would always be excellent, for he must be an excellent manager of his estate.

Elizabeth was from the Rhine country, and according to my ideas spoke with such a delightful accent that I listened to her with rapture. Sometimes she laughed gently at my honest Holstein *Plattdeutsch*, but only until I read and translated to her something by Klaus Groth—I think it was the touching poem “Min Jehann.”

When we were confirmed and graduated from the school came our parting. She went back to the household of numerous sisters in Bonn—her father was a pensioned officer of high rank—I to the seclusion of our estate. We corresponded diligently. Then came the news—her letter had crossed with mine containing the announcement of my engagement—that she had entered a sisterhood in Berlin, and felt very happy in her calling. She came to my wedding, and stood among the gayly dressed bridesmaids in the church, in the plain black gown which marked her calling. The dear face, framed in the deaconess cap, wore such an angelic look of peace that I was almost ashamed of my earthly happiness.

"Tell me, my dear," I asked her, as she embraced me tenderly and congratulated me, "are you then happy and contented ever with your lot?"

"Dear Annie, do not ask me, you must see it," was her answer. "I am very happy, very, and I wish you all the happiness that God alone can give."

These were her last words for a long time: her calm face gave me one more mild, pleasant smile from among the crowd of guests, as I drove from my father's house at my husband's side, amid music, hurrahs and brightly burning torches, to rule as mistress in the lofty apartments of Castle Rächnitz.

When, two years later, I sat alone in the old castle, a broken-hearted widow, among many, many other letters, which were meant to comfort and yet did not, came one from Elizabeth. It was the only one of them all which made me weep, for as yet I had not shed a tear. She wrote that she could all the more fully realize my great loss, since she too now loved with all her heart a man to whom she was soon to be married.

"My love for him brings me nearer to you than ever, Anna," she said among other things. "Could I but console you as his words would! As soon as we are settled in our simple assistant rector's house, you must come. Anna, promise me."

But years passed before I made this visit. I must learn to control my grief. I was dragged about the world; and perhaps it was then that the foundations were laid for the nomadic life which to this day I have preferred to live, for I have never found rest since my husband's death. In summer I lived at Rächnitz, which was left to me; in winter I went with a companion, now to Florence, now Rome, London or Paris; yes, even St. Petersburg was no more secure from me than Constantinople or Athens. Never-

theless I was familiar with the details of Elizabeth's life. I knew that her husband had meanwhile been promoted from assistant to pastor, that they had moved into the venerable parsonage in Borndorf, to the ringing of bells and over a path strewn with roses, and that two little blond-haired children, the pride and joy of my saintly Elizabeth, played in the old-fashioned rooms.

Then I arrived in Rächnitz two days before Whitsunday from the Italian lakes. I think my trunks were not yet unpacked. I had just listened to the overseer's reports of the crops, and was about to take a long nap in my cool boudoir, when a maid brought me a letter which had arrived in the morning.

"My dear madame," the letter began, in a man's firm handwriting. "As my poor Elizabeth is not yet equal to writing, she has commissioned me—we suppose that you are at home again—to tell you that in the time between the 15th and 25th of December, we lost our three dear children of diphtheria. God's hand has dealt heavily with us. He alone knows why He has taken these our treasures to Himself again——"

I read no further. I put the letter in the pocket of my travelling-gown, bade farewell to my housekeeper and servants, telling them that I was obliged to leave home again, wished my companion a pleasant vacation and, in the course of half an hour, after providing myself with a few necessities, drove to the nearest railway station, where I was fortunate enough to catch the express train, which bore me away in the same direction from which I had come that morning.

Saturday noon I stood before the post station of the little city, where the train had deposited me, so that there was nothing left for me to do but to travel by extra post if I would reach Borndorf that day. This journey and every-

thing that occurred during the next few days has remained imprinted upon my memory most distinctly, even to the smallest details. The road led through magnificent forests of pine, interspersed with beech trees in their fresh spring green foliage, sloping gently up hill ; the sun shone through the branches of the trees, the air was fragrant after a warm rain, and the sky slightly overcast. All nature seemed jubilant over the approaching festival, and the postilion on the box seemed looking forward with delight to a dance, for he blew upon his horn, gayly and with terribly false intonation, this one song continually :

“ Oh ! thou hast the loveliest eyes, love——”

I have never been able to disturb any one's happiness through my own melancholy mood, but to-day it was hard for me to listen to this music. But when the gay music at the approach of the cool afternoon changed to a melancholy refrain which actually moved me to tears I begged the man to cease. The notes were still ringing in my ears when my carriage rolled over the pavement of the little town, smelling of cake and May flowers, and stopped before the doors of the “ Red Trout.”

I scarcely allowed myself time to look at the room which the old innkeeper wished to show me. I asked for the parsonage of St. Martin's, and was directed to a street which ascended steeply, and was bathed in the last rays of the setting sun. The girls scouring and sweeping before the house doors, the young fellows fastening the Maypoles beside the stone bench, all ceased their occupations and listened for a moment to the mighty tongues of the bells ; the sounds so near by almost deafened me. Only the children continued their noisy play in anticipation of the joys of the morrow's festivities. I held one of the prettiest little girls fast by her pigtail.

"Come," said I coaxingly, "show me the way to the parsonage." The dear little thing sprang on ahead of me, and in a few minutes I reached the house, lying opposite the church. A high, dark-brown door with a shining brass knocker, the stone window and door settings beautifully carved with figures from Bible history, as well as the sloping upper story of framework with the tiny balcony also sloping, proclaimed the great age of the house.

I entered a huge hall, the knocker rang loudly through the room, and almost immediately an old woman appeared, coming from the kitchen.

"Mrs. Steinkopf has gone to the churchyard," she replied to my questions, "and Mr. Steinkopf is in the garden, studying his sermon for to-morrow."

As I did not wish to disturb the pastor, the old woman showed me into Elizabeth's room. I suddenly felt quite oppressed; whether it was the strong scent of elder which came from a large vase filled with blossoms, or the descending twilight in the unfamiliar room, or the little worn articles of clothing which lay spread out on a table close in front of me, and which gave out that odor peculiar to children's things which have long been unopened—I do not know. Those little things, evidently but recently laid here, seemed quite uncanny to me; I could plainly see the spots on a shabby pair of velvet trousers, the faded blue ribbons of a baby's dress, and the torn pinafore with an ink spot; then near by me playthings, broken animals, dolls, etc. In addition was the scent of faded cypress wreaths, mingled with that of fresh flowers, which a hand had laid among the playthings, arranged as a child would in playing "cook." The firm yellow centre of the syringa lay upon a tiny plate as butter, and the white petals floated in a tureen of water as soup.

I fairly shuddered. Incapable of longer bearing the

sight, I went to the window and opened it, while I gazed down the quiet street along which Elizabeth would come.

She must be very ill, I said to myself, very ill! And pity came over me with overwhelming force. I thought I could see the dear little flaxen heads peering out of the corners of the ghostly room, rosy, smiling, and their little faces rigid in death, surrounded with flowers; faces which no prayers, however ardent, could make smile again. God had deprived me of much. I had wept and repined, but better never to possess a child than to be forced, despite all one's prayers and struggles, to yield it up, powerless against the gloomy tyrant, although one would give her very heart's blood to keep the sweet life. It must be almost superhuman misery. Suddenly a feeling of terror amid these surroundings overcame me. I was about to flee to the kitchen when I saw the black figure of a woman coming down the street in the twilight.

Thank God, it is Elizabeth.

She came into the room at once, the girl had told her of a "stranger."

"Anna," said her voice. "Yes, I knew at once that it was you—but please come out, that is not for you—pray forgive me, Katharine did not suspect——"

And in the sitting-room she kissed me, and when she saw my pale face she comforted me in her old, sweet voice.

"Poor, dear Annie, you cannot understand that, and the things are only there for me." And once more she threw her arms around my neck and began to sob, but soon controlled herself.

"Let us not speak of it at all," she whispered, and her dear eyes had a far-away look. "Do you hear, I beg you not to speak of it, for I cannot bear it."

And with a self-control which astonished me she went

about the duties of a hostess whom a dear guest has surprised ; but she was changed, her movements were forced, her eyes unsteady, and when spoken to she started.

The supper table was laid in the summer-house, and for the first time I saw Elizabeth's husband. He was a tall, grave, sad-looking man, his hair very gray at the temples, his mouth wearing a mild expression. He was as tender and careful of his wife as of a child. He thanked me for coming, but wholly avoided mentioning the cause. Elizabeth scarcely uttered a word. Finally I started conversation by talking of my travels, and found that he was well acquainted with Rome ; he had passed many winters there as travelling companion to the princes.

We sat there in the darkness until perhaps ten o'clock, enjoying the delightful coolness of the May night, when the cook's voice called from the parsonage : " Mrs. Steinkopf ! "

Elizabeth rose at once and went to the house. I sat alone with her husband, whose head was turned in the direction in which his wife had disappeared.

" She has changed greatly, has she not ? " he asked.

" Yes ! " said I, checking my tears.

" A sore affliction has befallen us," he continued ; " but worse is threatening me if Elizabeth's condition remains the same. Something must happen to rouse her from this condition of utter apathy ; the doctor told me it was the highest time. She acts so strangely. She fulfils her household duties quietly, and as excellently as ever, but she never says a word about her lost darlings. She fairly avoids all common recollections with me, and carries on a most childish play with her keepsakes of them. Now, I know very well, now she is sitting among all the little things which belonged to the children, and fans the flame of her grief to the utmost.

It is just as though she had discovered herself on the verge of a mortal sin when she is sometimes unconsciously led to pay life its due. Recently, for instance, I dragged her to church with me, when a celebrated organist gave a concert on our magnificent old organ. She loves music. I saw that she forgot her grief while listening to those tones ; something of the sweet, gentle expression which I so love in her, appeared on her face, and then " — He paused — " I had turned my eyes from her for but an instant," he continued, " when I heard, in the middle of a beautiful passage, the sharp bang of the door of the church, and——she was gone. I hurried after her, and found her here in her room, her face buried in the dress of our youngest, her limbs trembling, and with hot tears bewailing that she could have forgotten even for a moment."

" But," I asked, deeply touched, " what has become of Elizabeth's submission to the will of God ? "

For a while he was silent. " Madame Anna," he began at length, " what human being has not at some time doubted the kindness and goodness of God ? How many are capable, in the face of such trials, of saying, ' Thy will be done, Lord, I will not repine ' ? It is so human to ask, ' Why didst Thou give only to take away ? ' Did you not ask something similar when you stood beside the coffin of your husband, who was taken from you in all the pride of youth ? "

" Yes," I confessed honestly.

" I have told her that she is richer than many. She has dear brothers and sisters ; one of them, her youngest brother, is coming here in June ; he is to attend the gymnasium here. She has many friends in the city, whom she has won by her dear childlike manner ; we realized it fully in the days of our sorrow ; and she has one besides," he added, softly.

He was touchingly modest as he said this last.

He broke off, for her dark figure came towards us just at this moment. She had a remarkably light tread; scarcely a pebble crunched under her feet.

"Your room is ready, Anna," she said.

"That is very sweet of you, Elizabeth," I replied; "but I am obliged to return to the inn to get my things, and I should love to have you come with me—I would prefer that you both come."

"I beg you to excuse me; but, Hermann, you will go, will you not?"

He was ready, and soon we walked down the street together. The night was a beautiful one; there was a scent of fresh green leaves and flowers, and wonderful moonlight lay over the town and the mountains beyond, like a silvery veil; the fountains plashed softly, and a clear girlish voice was singing somewhere near by.

Under the linden tree before my inn, all the benches were full, and the tops of the beer mugs clapped briskly. A band of students, their gay-colored caps visible in the lamp-light, sang their songs—a jovial company. I also noticed two young women among them, and I remember how I turned to look at one of them again; she was a slender young woman, with a crown of ash-blonde hair; she leaned against the trunk of the tree with folded arms, her whole face seemed to laugh, her red lips and great dark eyes. The handsome student near her must have paid her some fine compliment as he drank her health.

I stood still. Beauty, and such really surprising beauty, has always excited my admiration. She noticed my astonishment, for her great black eyes suddenly flashed threateningly at me, and her mouth took on a scornful expression. Then she took a glass from the table and drank slowly; her eyes were resting upon the student again.

They began to sing, while I, turning myself away from

the charming picture with difficulty, entered the house. The pastor had long since gone into the empty sitting-room ; he would wait there for me, he had said.

I looked for him, and promised to come back as soon as possible ; then I began to gather my things together upstairs, for I had unpacked somewhat, with the assistance of the maid.

“Tell me,” I said to the girl, “does the beautiful blonde woman live here in the house—the one standing down there among the students? She is probably one of the actresses?”

“Oh—*she!*” said the girl scornfully. “I do not understand how the master can keep those people in the house. Her husband behaves quite respectably, but she—she thinks because she is the wife of the manager that she has only to command ; and besides, she does not get along with *her* husband, it is a cat and dog life. Madame may be glad that she is going away, for the company have rooms up-stairs, and the noise is terrible ; sometimes one thinks her husband will kill her on the spot.”

As though the truth of this speech were to be demonstrated at once, steps suddenly flew down the corridor outside, a man’s heavy tread hurrying after them, and almost immediately there was a woman’s cry of terror, followed by a heavy fall. God knows I have never tried to interfere in my fellowmen’s quarrels, but here I had no choice, it seemed as though the young woman’s beauty had bewitched me. I ran across the hall and up the stairs ; down-stairs nothing had been heard, it was evident, for no one came, and now all was silence. I was about to return when I discovered by the flickering light of a small oil lamp, which served to illuminate the hall, a child, close before me, on the lowest step.

It sat there in its little shirt, two big tears on its fat

cheeks, and yet its little red mouth and a pair of magnificent black eyes laughed up at me. The little thing was perhaps three years and a half old, and I stared at it as though it were a wonder. I have seen many charming children ; in Spain, little beings such as Murillo painted ; blonde English faces with something celestial about them, and once a gypsy child so beautiful that I would gladly have purchased it from its parents ; but I had never yet seen any child as lovely as the one here before me.

"Papa is striking my mamma," it said with a smile, and at that moment leaned closer to me, for a man's voice began violently inside the room :

"I beg just one thing of you, Tosca ; do not excite me more by speaking. You know I love you madly, but when you rouse me to jealousy I do not know what I am about. I have had enough recently ; for the child's sake cease such actions ; I cannot endure it——"

The last words sounded quite gentle.

There may have been some reply, although I heard nothing, for now the man pleaded, with a sob : "Tosca, you will not do that—you will not leave me ; you cannot !"

I stood there quite at a loss. "Go to your mother, little one !" I said coaxingly. "You will take cold here ; it is too chilly." I tried to unclasp the little arms to free myself, but then a piteous cry arose. In an instant the door was opened, and the woman stood before me. Her hair hung in confusion about her white face, which was deeply flushed on the left side, and the dainty lace in one sleeve seemed torn.

"I bring you your little one, madame," said I, composedly. "It sat on the stairs, and might easily have fallen."

"Thank you, she will not fall," was the answer, "and

she knows our door." And catching up the child, with a short "Do not trouble yourself further," she disappeared into her room, banging the door behind her.

I excused my long delay to the pastor, whom I found awaiting me in the same place in the sitting-room ; and, accompanied by the waiter, we set out on our return. The students had left the benches for the house, for the night watchman had interrupted their song, on account of the citizens. Only one still stood outside, staring up at a couple of lighted windows in the top story as though bewitched.

I slept but little that night ; the nightingales sang almost too loudly in the garden, and I was over-tired by the long railway journeys of the last five days. I still thought of the two couples of whose lives I had had a glimpse that evening : the one in peaceful, safe circumstances, the other on dangerous ground, tossed about like a ship in a storm, to-day here, to-morrow there, and both unhappy. They were no Whitsuntide thoughts which occupied my mind, I confess frankly ; life often draws us violently away from what we should do ; there is nothing more obstinate than one's thoughts, they will not be diverted from the object they centre about, and the more one seeks to master them, the more unruly are they. Only toward morning did I fall asleep, and—oh, disgrace !—overslept the service. I think it was about eleven o'clock when I awoke, to find Elizabeth standing near me in her deep mourning, and gazing at me anxiously.

"Why did you not wake me ?" I asked.

"Be glad that you can sleep, Anna ; what have you missed ?"

"Oh, I have missed church, and my morning devotions, and that, too, in a parsonage."

She made no answer. As in our girlhood days, she

began to help me dress, and I let her. She combed out my hair with the same light hand.

"Yes, Lieschen," I sighed, "I have many gray hairs. Child, we are really still young; what are thirty years?"

She shook her brown head. "Oh, I have grown so old since then, Anna."

"Yes, you act so; but it is wrong, Elizabeth."

"Not in years, but here!" She pointed to her heart.

"My sweet child, do you no longer love your husband a little bit?"

She stared at me anxiously. "We no longer understand each other, Anna; he can no longer understand me. But speak no more of it, speak no more——"

I held her fast. "Yes, let us speak just of that! If you have a spark of friendship left for me, answer me now. Why do you think that you no longer understand each other, Elizabeth?"

"He scarcely misses the children!" she burst out. "He did not love them, he only tolerated them; they disturbed him——"

"For heaven's sake, Elizabeth, how unjust your grief makes you!" I cried, horrified.

"No, Anna, no—not unjust; it is, alas! the truth."

"Elizabeth, pray tell me from what you judge that."

She hesitated for a while, then she began slowly, her voice hoarse: "The two youngest had been buried the day before, but the boy was still healthy. I had sent him into the garden, so that he might get as much fresh air as possible, and escape the contagion in the house. He was an unusually active child. I stood by the kitchen window, and watched him racing over the lawn as though mad. This was usually forbidden the children, but I did not think of that then. I had folded my hands and prayed with all my heart: 'Dear God, leave me my only child;

leave him to me !’ You know Hermann’s study looks out on the garden. I believe he was working ; he *could* work, perhaps he had to—he had knocked on the window-pane several times, then he called out : ‘ John, be quiet, this moment. Do you hear ? ’

“ I do not know what possessed the child, usually so obedient. Was it an unconscious farewell of his dear young life—was it already fever coursing through his veins ? He stood still for a few seconds, then rushed up to the swing, and began to swing himself so violently that I hurried out to quiet him, fearing that he would fall out, for he was swinging so high in the air. As he saw me coming across the lawn, he cried : ‘ Hurrah, mamma, now I am flying up to heaven—so high, so high ! ’ ‘ John ! ’ I cried anxiously, but Hermann stood behind me ; he grasped first the rope of the swing, then the child. I can still see the great blue eyes under the fur cap. They had filled with tears, and the little face wore a frightened look.

“ ‘ Hermann,’ I cried, ‘ do not strike him, do not strike him to-day ! ’ But it was too late—the punished child—the blows had not been hard—suddenly lay in my arms as though unconscious. I knelt down on the damp grass with him, and finally he said softly, ‘ Mamma, I have such a headache ; ’ and then he clutched at his little throat, and then”—Elizabeth had buried her face in her hands, and turned her back to me—“ then he became ill, and——”

The rest of her speech was swallowed up in a cry, so mournful and heart-broken, that I understood all, and, taking her in my arms, wept with her, as she sobbed on my breast as though beside herself.

“ Elizabeth,” I said at length, “ you know that who loves his child chastises it. He only wished to punish him for his little naughtiness. See——”

“ He—he told me that,” she burst out, “ but you do not

know how it was. That change in the dear little face, those great anxious eyes—and what had he done, the little fellow? He had been wild, as boys are. You cannot know how children's eyes gaze at one, Anna, when they are unjustly punished—so questioningly, so very sadly. His last feeling on earth was pain, which was inflicted upon him because he laughed and rejoiced. Since then I cannot bear to hear a child cry. I am almost out of my senses when one is struck, and I pushed Hermann's hand away from the little corpse, almost beside myself. I know I am changed, but it was not my own doing."

So she sobbed on, as though all her fearful pain burst its bonds to-day for the first time. "There is a wall of separation raised between us forever!" she cried. "God pity me, but I cannot go on living so!"

I found no word of comfort, nor did she expect it. She pressed my hand, and with a soft, whispered, "Let it be enough!" she left the room.

Not a word was spoken at dinner. Elizabeth disappeared into her room after the meal was ended; the pastor went to church, and I, too, took my hymn book, and went to service. A young deacon preached to some children and old women. Almost every one was out in the woods celebrating Whitsunday. I resolved to take a stroll there after the service, and carried out my resolution. It had always had an unspeakable charm for me to take short walks of exploration in such little old towns; besides, I could not bear to be in the house.

The streets were deserted; the sun shone brightly, and I walked along without thinking whither. Here and there some old people sat on the benches before the houses, and enjoyed the festival in their own way. I strolled along several broad, handsome streets, admired some very old houses, paused in astonishment before the quaint, unoccu-

pied ducal castle, behind which large gardens seemed to extend, and asked a boy whether people were allowed to walk in the castle park?

"Oh yes, as much as you choose," was the pleasant answer, followed with directions as to the street to take; and so I finally, after passing through several narrow lanes, reached a magnificent avenue of lindens, in which, as it seemed to me, all the children of Borndorf were playing, and saw, not far ahead of me, the open gateway of the ducal gardens, over which was fastened a placard, with the sensible notice that children and dogs would only be admitted when accompanied by adults.

There were immense neglected stretches of lawn. A little rushing mountain-stream crossed the park. Dense thickets of blooming shrubs, in the shade inviting seats, and, above all, magnificent old trees, giving delightful shade, made this creation of the past a really beautiful garden.

No one here! Near one of the side paths stood a sign-board, with the inscription, "To the ducal theatre."

I followed this path, and ascending a hill I came to a clearing where stood a decrepit miniature theatre. All the doors and windows were open, and an old man was sweeping and raising perfect clouds of dust.

Oh yes, this evening "Faust" was to be given.

I resolved to go, for such travelling troupes had always had an attraction for me. "Elizabeth will not care," I thought, "she prefers to be quite alone."

I asked the old man if he sold tickets.

"No," was the answer; but the wife of the director chanced to be there—if I would knock at this door; I had entered the old building and stood opposite a door which must lead to the stage.

There was no answer to my knock; I opened the door, and started back in alarm. The stage was almost dark,

only through a crack above the flies fell a single dazzling sunbeam. Here stood the woman I sought—the beauty of yesterday evening; her light figure stood out plainly in the dim light; the black eyes in the white face gazed at a slender student who stood before her, his back turned to me. The sunbeam lay between them like a fiery sword, while millions of motes danced in it.

Softly and hastily I closed the door and left the building; I only breathed freely when I stood outside in the fresh, warm air. All the blood had rushed to my heart, as though I had seen a ghost in there and could not overcome my horror. And now involuntarily I paused—a man came down the path, leading the child whom I had seen yesterday, by the hand. She was daintily dressed in white, with blue ribbons on her long blonde hair.

I felt as though some misfortune was about to occur, but what did these strangers and their lives and deeds concern me? Nevertheless, this feeling did not prevent me from gazing again and again at the child. She, too, had turned her little head, and as I threw her a kiss she broke away from her father and made me a charming, awkward little courtesy, which only increased her roguish loveliness.

I came home by a circuitous way, just at supper time. Elizabeth met me in the garden. "Poor Anna, you are certainly bored," she said sadly. "If I only knew——"

"Oh, do not be vexed, Lieschen; I have been on such an exploration stroll."

We sat silently in the garden, and I turned the conversation to our youth. "Do you remember, Elizabeth, how you tried to learn Low German?"

She nodded. "I remember the poem you tried to teach me, Anna," said she; "I once attempted to translate it into

High German, but I did not succeed. Ah, yes, Anna, childhood is sacred as a child itself."

She paused, for her husband drew near.

This evening, for the first time, I noticed the relation of the two; only during the silent repast it came to me, with crushing might, how near and yet how far apart they were. She almost anxiously avoided glancing at him, while he sought her eye. She paid him every attention to which he seemed accustomed; she mixed his tea, spread his bread, and answered his questions, but it was almost automatically. He often shook his head in silence, while he tried to talk to me. It was just the same as yesterday, only more noticeable since I had heard Elizabeth's confession.

When it struck half-past ten, I had endured enough, and rose to say good-night. Then down the gravel path, which was flooded with bright moonlight, old Katharine came hurrying faster than I would have thought possible for her old feet.

"Mr. Steinkopf"—she could scarcely find words—"Mr. Steinkopf, you must come quickly to the 'Red Trout;' an actor has stabbed his wife. Ah! Mr. Steinkopf, pray run quickly, before she dies."

He hurried away. I sat motionless beside Elizabeth, and knew, as though I had been there, exactly what had occurred. I could have given every particular of the deed. "The poor child!" I cried, thinking of the little one.

Then I sprang up, and was about to hurry to the house.

"A child, Anna?" asked Elizabeth, grasping my arm. "Has the woman a child?"

"Yes, a girl—a dear little thing."

"And the mother is dying?" she continued, breathlessly.

"I do not know, Elizabeth. I will find out."

"Wait, I will come with you."

In a few minutes we arrived at the inn. A crowd had collected, and were staring up at the windows of the house—people flushed with the Whitsun frolics, with green twigs in their hats, and heated faces, mothers with little children in their arms, and young girls in light gowns who had hurried from the dancing hall. All wished to hear what had happened, and, if possible, see. “The pastor has gone up-stairs,” we heard some one say, “and the mayor—and the police——”

Under the linden-tree, whither we forced our way with difficulty, sat a group of elderly men, talking eagerly; the notes of a waltz floated from the windows of the dancing hall which overlooked the garden, and drowned the clapping of the tops of the beer-mugs: the air was redolent of sausages. At last we reached the hall; only a policeman stood there, and was about to refuse us admission, but when he saw Elizabeth, he drew aside.

“She is already dead, Mrs. Steinkopf,” said he.

“Where is the child?” asked Elizabeth.

“The child is probably with the actresses in No. 7; they all ran there from the theatre.”

“Did the accident happen in the theatre?” I asked.

“Yes, madame, on the stage—he had, I believe, some scene to act with a knife——”

Elizabeth hurried up the stairs, and, without first knocking, opened the door of No. 7. I will never forget the sight. A tallow candle in a china candlestick faintly lighted the large room, and there sat or stood some six or seven women, still in their theatrical costumes, their faces pale under the paint.

Martha, judging from her dress, held the child in her lap; the others, part of the populace, in remarkable old German costumes, seemed unable to believe the terrible reality. I have never seen such horrified faces.

"Is that the dead woman's child?" asked Elizabeth.

The old woman in the matronly cap, instead of answering, began to sob. The child, frightened by the disfigured faces, cried softly.

"Is the husband really the murderer?" asked the little woman at my side, without taking her eyes from the small blonde matron.

"Yes!" was the monosyllabic answer.

"He played the part of Valentine," said a young girl, "They had some words after the first act; he declared that she was always making eyes at a student. I saw it too; he sat with two or three others in a proscenium box. She always behaved so, and the manager was as jealous as Othello."

"Yes," said another; "a few weeks ago, in E——, we thought he would shoot her. Now he will be sent to prison."

"If not worse," sobbed Martha.

"Yes, he will be hanged," came a voice from the corner.

The scream of another silenced the prophetess of evil.

"No," said a third, "she drove him to desperation. On my soul, I will swear—I——"

"Has the unfortunate man or woman relatives?" Elizabeth interrupted.

"Not so much as a cat belongs to them."

"What will become of the child?" said Elizabeth.

"Yes, that we do not know."

And now Martha raised her thin weak voice and gave an account of the dead woman's life which made us shudder, the first words contained such grave accusations.

"Be silent," said Elizabeth gravely; "we are all sinners, the Bible says; perhaps you can remember the words from the days of your childhood,"

Suddenly she stood close to the surprised woman, and without further remark took the child from her arms. "Come."

"To my mamma?" cried the child, and put her little arms confidingly around the neck, and laid her face, with the poor sleepy little eyes, against the cheek of my Elizabeth.

"Yes, to your mother," said she soothingly. As she turned to the door the pastor entered. He stared at Elizabeth as though she were an apparition.

"Elizabeth!" said he uncertainly.

"I will keep her," said she softly and firmly.

"Come out with her; her father wishes to take leave——"

The door closed behind us. In the hall, surrounded by policemen, stood a tall, slender man, still young, his hair clinging to his damp forehead, his face deathly pale.

"Do not be anxious about the child," said Elizabeth mildly. "I will faithfully care for her, if you will give her to me."

The man stared at her gentle face, as though to judge to whom he was now to confide his only treasure in this world.

"It is the pastor's wife; you may be content," one of the policemen whispered to him compassionately.

A look of relief passed over the rigid face. He seized the weeping child in his arms, and kissed it as though he would suffocate it, and as he gave it back to Elizabeth, he murmured, scarce audibly: "May God bless you for having pity on the child of a murderer and dishonored man!"

It seemed as though these words awakened me, for until now I had witnessed all as in a dream. "Elizabeth!" I said.

It had grown still; the steps of the prisoner and his guard died away; only she, the pastor, and I were left in

the hall. She made no answer, but took off her shawl and wrapped the child in it, for the little thing was in her night-clothes. Her husband watched her in silence.

“Now come,” said she.

We went down-stairs. The crowd had followed the poor fellow to the city hall; our street was silent and deserted.

What was passing in the mind of the man who walked beside me? Elizabeth was ahead; she walked along in the bright moonlight, her tread as quick and elastic as though she carried no burden. We reached the house. The pastor hurried up and opened the door for his wife. “In God’s name, then!” I heard him say.

I ascended the broad stairs to my room. There was nothing for me to do down-stairs; I saw the pastor put his arm around Elizabeth, and draw her over the threshold, for she staggered under her burden. What might she not be bringing into the house with this child? What might not be its inheritance of sin and passions? I shuddered as I repeated the words, “The child of a murderer and dishonored man!” Had they forgotten that there is a God who visits the sins of the fathers upon the children?

I could not sleep: I opened the window and gazed out into the garden; the nightingales sang; the moon shone so brightly, turning every leaf to silver. It was probably shining into the cell of the man who had loved so passionately the wife whom he had killed, and through the windows of the room below me, too, where Elizabeth was preparing a bed for the child beside hers. I could hear soft coming and going down there.

Then all grew quiet, and I heard Elizabeth’s gentle voice say, softly and yet so distinctly: “Hermann, I thank you!”

Then he answered, in a voice trembling with emotion:

"Yes, Elizabeth, let there be peace between us once more ; it is high time. Your child—ours—the dear boy, I did not punish him in impatience or anger at his disobedience. I was afraid, terribly afraid, that he would take cold in his mad romping ; you——"

She sobbed now quite loudly, and he closed the window ; I, too, closed mine.

Only Elizabeth could do such a thing, I thought to myself, drawing the thick curtains to shut out the moonlight. I felt mournful and softened ; I should not have had the courage. What strength of mind, what unselfishness and love, what confidence in God, were necessary to enable one to take this child to her heart !

The next morning I frankly expressed my opinion to the pastor as we walked up and down in the garden. It had stormed during the night, and the air was delightfully cool. I saw by his pale face that anxiety had made him wakeful during the past night.

"Dear Madame Anna," he replied, as I remarked to him that I believed in the heredity of characteristics and temperament, "we can only do our duty, and that we will do for the child to the best of our ability ; the rest is in God's hands. Elizabeth came back from the churchyard with tearful eyes ; her grief has grown milder ; she lives again ; she is the old Elizabeth once more ; I owe it to this little stranger, God bless her !"

I pressed his hand. "And bless you both," I added.

A few days later I departed. My carriage rolled away from the quiet parsonage, and as I turned once more at the corner, I saw Elizabeth's delicate figure standing on the door-step, the child in her arms, and she nodded and waved her hand to me.

"She is better than I," I thought to myself, as I had so often done before.

Since then I had heard and seen only good of the three beings in the Borndorf parsonage. The little thing had become a charming child—not a pattern of goodness, as Elizabeth wrote or told me—but with no remarkably bad traits of character. She was tenderly attached to her adoptive parents, whom she knew only as her own. They had seen in a paper that her father had been released from prison upon a proclamation of universal amnesty, but that had been years ago. He had not troubled himself about his child; perhaps he had learned that she was well cared for, and may have thought that he would not disturb her peace with his ruined life. He had offered no objections to a legal adoption, and Martha Steinkopf had long since become the legal child of her adoptive parents.

As I say, I had seen the half-grown, really charming girl at a little summer resort on the North Sea, had rejoiced over her beauty and winning ways, and, had it not been for Elizabeth's gentle, prudent, counteracting influence, would have thoroughly spoiled her. She was very pious at that time, this young girl; over her bed hung a picture of Christ, and in the evenings she used to kneel down beside her bed in her long white night-dress, and pray aloud.

"Elizabeth," I said once, as we were walking on the beach at low tide, while Martha and her father were some distance ahead, eagerly searching for mussels, "when she is a little older, I shall ask you to lend her to me for a while."

Elizabeth gazed at me. "No, dear Annie," she replied firmly, "that would not be for the child's good."

"Why not?"

"I know what you have in mind, you dear, worldly woman; you wish to parade her young beauty. You would take her to Berlin with you, to balls and on long journeys, and put all kinds of ideas in her head. No, Anna, her

character is not yet fully formed. I will not let her go out of my hands yet ; it would be wrong."

"But you cannot shut her up, Elizabeth."

"Certainly not. Do we attempt it? She has enough enjoyment in her life. Does she look as though she were deprived of anything? Do not be vexed, Anna ; you do not suspect how anxious I have always been about her."

"Very well. Be calm, Elizabeth ; I will not spoil your child," said I, touched.

"Do not misunderstand me, Anna ; my own child I would have lent to you for years, but this one—no, not this one."

Then we corresponded frequently until a year and a half ago, since which time I have received no answer to my letters, and——

Suddenly I rouse myself from my recollections and return to the present. It has grown dark ; the rain still falls upon the linden leaves and the pavement. Dear God ! what can have become of this child ?

I was about to ring for a light, when there was a shy knock, and as I called "Come in !" some one slowly crossed the threshold—slowly, and coughing ; and against the bright background of the open doorway, I distinguish that it is an old woman in a white cap and shawl.

"You probably do not recognize me, madame. I am 'old Katharine from the parsonage,' as you used to call me."

"Why, Katharine !" I cry, "this is nice in you !" And while I lead the old woman to a chair and ring for lights, I ask : "How did you learn that I am here, Katharine ?"

"I will tell you afterward, madame ; I must first get my breath a bit," and she coughed, and drew long, quick breaths.

"Are you still living at the parsonage, old Katharine ?"

"Oh, Heaven forbid ! What could they do with such an

old cripple? No, madame, for a year I have been in the old women's home, down on White Street. You know, madame, the pastor got me admitted."

The girl now brings a lamp, and stares at the old woman in surprise.

"I am well taken care of, and could live at ease," she continued, "if it were not for the grief of the last two years." The old woman's wrinkled face, now that I can see it, wears a look of sincere grief. She looks me straight in the eyes. "Ah, yes, she no longer looks like you, madame—her hair is quite white, and her eyes have grown so large—oh, dear Heaven!"

I draw a chair near hers, and say: "Now, tell me all, Katharine."

"Yes, I will try, and if I wander away from the subject you must help me, ma'am, and do not be vexed if I have to stop and cough."

"Oh, of course not, Katharine."

"You know how it happened—that the child was taken into our house. It horrified me then, but the master and mistress knew better; they thought that with their love and kindness, and prayers, they could make of the wild plant a beautiful flower. Ah, ma'am, she was a fine child to look at, and so were her manners, as nice as though she were descended from kings, and so she moved among the children with whom she played, and they were the children of the mayor and all the best people in town. And how good she was, and how she could coax! It was always, 'My darling Katharine!' when she wanted her doll's cup filled with milk, or a few raisins to play house with. And then she was so smart! When anything was read to her she knew it by heart, at once, and she could recite it again so beautifully, with such gestures. The pastor himself, in the chancel, could not do it better. She was naughty some-

times ; but then she was punished. Yes, Mrs. Steinkopf was strict, although one could easily see that it was hard for her to be so. But she had grown into Mr. Steinkopf's heart as though she were his own child.

“When she was confirmed, all the people in the church had eyes for her alone ; she looked very beautiful in her plain black frock, with the golden cross—as golden as her hair—on her breast. And as she came out of church afterward, beside Mrs. Steinkopf, every one whispered behind her how beautiful she was, and the young councillor put his eyeglass in his eye, and stretched his hand and said, ‘Magnificent!’ I was outside and heard and saw everything, how the mistress looked displeased, and the child flushed and glanced about, and for the first time there was a look in the black eyes—a look such as I had never seen before. I cannot describe it—a kind of joy which I did not think suited to the day and hour. And when I came up-stairs that evening to see that her room was in order, she was standing before the mirror, and looking at herself with a smile. ‘Good gracious, Martha,’ I cried, ‘what are you looking at? There is really nothing unusual in your face. The nose goes down, and the mouth across!’ She laughed at that, and grew red. But I saw very well that a spark had fallen in the powder, which burned on secretly until it burst into flames.

“It is not wrong, ma'am, it is even natural, that a young girl should rejoice in her beauty ; but with her it was different. She had loved admiration even when she was a little girl ; then she had been happy if she were called ‘very good,’ but now her beauty came in question. About that time I was somewhat ailing, and the mistress took a young girl to help me, and our child was to look after the housekeeping. They told me that I was to rest, spin a little, and sit in the sun and warm myself. Ernestine,

the new girl, was ignorant, but she was always lively, and would sing at her work as though the whole house belonged to her alone. She knew all kinds of songs, songs which I had sung when I was young, and because Martha liked to hear them, she was almost always in the kitchen.

“Mrs. Steinkopf said nothing when our young lady hummed them as she sat in the garden at her sewing, or in the house; she always enjoyed seeing her happy. And there was no harm in it, ma’am; it was only that Ernestine talked so much to our child, who knew nothing of the world. Mrs. Steinkopf’s brother was in love with the child, and wanted to marry her, but her parents thought she was too young, and he must wait. Had they only not decided that! Many a girl marries at eighteen. Dear me, it was always so quiet in the house, ma’am, and when there was a company, a young girl would not enjoy herself much—all older people, who talked intelligently and learnedly, and young people like a little foolishness and gayety. The child’s rosy cheeks gradually grew paler, and when she sat by the window she stared out with great longing eyes, and sometimes, of a summer evening, I would find her standing by the garden wall staring down at the roofs of the houses in the valley, and her little feet kept time to the dance music which was being played down there, while her eyes were full of tears.

“‘Katharine,’ she asked me once, ‘did you ever dance when you were young?’ Well, I could not lie; I *did* dance, and it is true that it was fun, especially when I danced with my sweetheart. But I said: ‘Yes, child, but it only makes one’s feet ache and heart beat!’ and hurried away. Sometimes I thought to myself that dancing was no sin, and that they might allow her to dance, but nothing was ever said about it.

“Sometimes I teased her about Mrs. Steinkopf’s brother,

but then she grew angry and said he was like porridge, and she could not bear such a man. It is true, I should not have wanted to marry him, such a gentle creature, always so sweet, but still he is a good man.

“It is just a year and a half since the postman came one morning with a letter with a great seal, and then Mrs. Steinkopf came into the kitchen and said to the child: ‘Father and I must go away for a few days, on family affairs. You must keep house, my little Martha; I can depend upon you, can I not?’ The child begged: ‘Dear mother, take me with you, oh, take me with you; the world is so beautiful, and I should so like to see the Rhine—oh, so much!’ and she threw her arms around the mistress’ neck, and petted her and kissed her, and begged: ‘Take me with you, oh, please, please!’ But it was of no use. It was in September, just when the fruit was ripening, and the mistress said that must all be attended to, and Martha must be a dear, good child. It was a business trip concerning a dead uncle’s will. She—Martha—would soon fly out into the world, perhaps next summer.

“Well, in short, they left her alone. She cried awhile, then sang; with her, tears and laughter came in one breath. I was to look after the house, and take good care of the two young girls. Ah, ma’am, I was taken down with rheumatism, and had to keep my bed. The child took care of me—she was good, very good: for three days she scarcely left my bedside, she read aloud to me, shook up my pillows, and made me laugh in spite of my pain. One afternoon she came to my room with some coffee. She looked like a rose. I thought it was from the fire, for she had been preserving plums; but it was not, for she cried from the doorway: ‘Katharine, this evening you must stay alone. I am going out!’ ‘Are you invited to the Schmidts?’ I asked, for Mrs. Steinkopf had begged

the assistant's young wife to look after the child a little. 'Why, yes, Martha dear—go, of course; Ernestine can make my soup.' Then she seated herself beside the bed, and said: 'No, Katharine, I am not going to the Schmidts'—if you only knew where I am going—guess!' I guessed the whole city, but still she shook her head, and the more I guessed the more she laughed, and finally she said: 'Never mind, you would never guess; I am going to the theatre with Mila Krafft; Mrs. Krafft sent the girl a little while ago. She is ill and cannot use her ticket, so she wanted me to have it, because I am so lonely.'

"I thought I had not heard aright. You probably do not know the Kraffts, ma'am? They live in the fine house at the corner of the Market, and money is as plentiful as hay with them, and they spend it for everything. Mila had gone to school with our child, but the mistress never liked her very much, she was such a vain, bold thing; she could not forbid Martha from associating with her, so Martha went there to tea occasionally. 'What!' I cried, 'you are going to the theatre with Mila Krafft? No, my darling, my sweet, I will not let you!' She stared at me. 'Do not be disagreeable, Katharine; there is such a lovely piece to be given, *Krawall und Liebe*——'

"'That is fine,' I cried. '*Krawall und Liebe* may be something very fine, but it is no use.' But she did not hear me; she laughed until tears ran down her cheeks, and kneeling beside my bed, she buried her face in the pillow and shook with laughter: 'Katharine, oh, Katharine!' she cried, 'how can you be so ignorant?' And finally, when she had grown calm, she said: 'You know the white plaster bust in father's room, in the bookcase, the one of which you broke the nose with the broom, and I glued it on again?' 'Yes, child; what has the poor saint to do with this?' 'But,' said she, beginning to laugh

again, 'that is Friedrich Schiller, who wrote the piece!' 'Why, is that so, child?' 'Certainly, Katharine,' said she, and her face was quite serious, 'and there can be nothing wrong in it, can there, Katharine?' said she, coaxingly.

"Well, now, if Mr. Steinkopf had such a thing in his study, what objection could I make? And I remembered that there was a play about Luther and his Kate, where dear little angels come out and say: 'Ah! if I only knew whether—' But she threw her arms around my neck and kissed my old face, so tenderly and so often that I thought she could not be more impassioned if she were kissing her sweetheart, and then she ran away, and did not come back until the lamps were lighted, and she looked as pretty as a pink.

"'Child, your best dress!' 'Yes; Mila said we are to sit in a box; and, besides, the Prince is here for the hunting, and is coming to the theatre with his gentlemen,' she said in excuse.

"'I did not know that our Prince liked to see such pious pieces,' I thought to myself. 'Good-by, Katharine,' said the child, and she turned once more in the doorway, and her great black eyes flashed at me roguishly from beneath the white hood with the fur border. 'Katharine,' she cried, 'I will greet the court marshal, Von Kalb, for you!' 'Who?' said I, but she was gone.

"Then I began to be remorseful, and an uncertain feeling of anxiety overcame me. You know, ma'am, there are such things as premonitions—do not laugh at me—that evening I felt that something was about to happen to the child, and down-stairs, in the pastor's study, the picture of the mistress when she was a bride fell from the wall, and the glass broke. About eleven o'clock, Martha came back from the theatre; she tried to creep quietly into her room, but I called to her to come in.

“‘Where have you been so long, child?’ I asked, but she did not answer, and looked miserable. ‘Pray speak, child. Has anything happened to you? Was it not nice?’

“‘Not nice? It was wonderful!’

“‘Did you cry, my little dove?’

“‘Oh, so much, Katharine.’

“‘Over the play! Dear child, that is only make-believe!’

“She looked at me quite scornfully, then with a ‘Good-night’ she left the room. She was not her usual self. But in the night, toward morning, my door opening softly waked me, and she came to my bed in her night-dress, and said: ‘I must ask you something, Katharine. I cannot sleep until I know.’

“‘Good gracious! what are you about?’ I cried. ‘You will certainly catch cold. First put a shawl round you.’

“‘It is very short, Katharine. I only wish to know whether it is true that my real father was a—’ she hesitated—‘a—’ she repeated, but could not utter the word—‘that he stabbed my mother?’

“And it sounded as though a dying woman were speaking.

“‘Good heavens! who told you that?’ I cried.

“‘Is it true, then? I wish to know whether it is true! That I am an adopted child, I know; they told me that at school. But——’

“‘I do not know,’ said I, lying in my terror; ‘ask your parents when they come home. It is a shame to tell you such a thing. Who did it?’

“‘One of the actresses, who played the part of the old miller’s wife,’ she said, in a strange voice.

“‘How did you happen to speak to the actress?’

“‘The old woman kept staring at me from the stage. I sat with Mila and her father in the proscenium box, and in

the third act, as I was trembling to know what was to become of the poor lovers, the box-door opened softly behind me, and a voice called my name in a low voice. I rose cautiously, so as not to disturb any one, for I thought it was Ernestine come to tell me that you were worse, or that father and mother had come; but there stood the old miller's wife in person outside in the corridor, and said she must speak to me for a minute after the performance. She knew that I was the pastor's adopted child, and she could tell me something of my mother: I looked enough like her to be her own self. And then—then we agreed, Katharine, that she should wait for me by the church. Mila and her father accompanied me home, and then I pretended that I was looking after them, and ran to meet the old actress, who was waiting for me in the church portico. But she wanted me to come to her room for a while, and because I wanted, oh, so much, to hear something of my own mother—I—do not scold me, Katharine, I went with her.'

"I scold, ma'am! I could find no words to express my fright.

" 'The old actress,' the child went on, 'was not quite so old when she had washed off the paint. She lives in Mr. Meyer's house on the corner, away up on the top floor. She took me in her arms and kissed me, and cried as she told me that she was present at the time when my father—oh! Katharine—and really *she* wanted to take me, for she had been mamma's best friend, but she did not know what she could do with me while I was so young.

"And suddenly the child threw herself down beside my bed, and began to sob and cry as violently as yesterday she had laughed. And there was I, an old cripple, and worried so that I could not speak.

" 'Katharine, is it true, then—is it true?'

"What could I say, ma'am? Silence means consent.

And whatever she thought, she grew calmer. The first gray light of the morning was shining in at the window as I said to her: 'Go to bed, my child. To-morrow I will talk with you, and then you will be calmer; but you shall not go to the theatre again, and if that old woman dares to come here I will have her turned out of the house post haste.'

"She rose and staggered out of the room without saying a word. But she did not lie down, but paced up and down her room. 'Thank God!' I thought, 'that her parents are coming home to-morrow. I will send Ernestine to Mrs. Schmidt to-morrow, and ask her to invite the child over to her house—the poor child! If the pastor knew that she had sat in the room of an actress——'

"The next day comes a letter from Mrs. Steinkopf, saying that her husband had been taken ill in Bonn, and she must stay there until he recovered, for she could not leave him; Martha must write very often how she was, and her sick father so longed for his darling. Martha looked so strangely, as she read the letter aloud, that I was surprised; it was as if she were not at all sorry. Her black eyes gazed dreamily out of the window near which she sat, but she said nothing.

"Madame, it was so easy for the child to deceive me; I lay in bed helpless, and Ernestine, sly creature, was only too willing to help the child in what she did, perhaps had to do. You see, ma'am, I lived at service in the parsonage since I was eighteen years old, but, in spite of all sermons, I have always said that a person does what he must, but not what he wills; some are governed by an angel, like Mrs. Steinkopf, and others are spurred on by the Evil One. And for those whose fathers and mothers and grandparents have always been guided by angels only, it is not hard to walk as they should; but a child like ours,

to whose christening all the Sins have been invited, would need the strength of giants to walk in the narrow path, and she was a weak young thing. Yes, yes, ma'am ; you cannot alter the kind."

"Why, Katharine !" I interrupted her philosophy.

"So it is ! And, in short, ma'am, the Devil had thrown a rope around her neck, as I said before, and the actor's blood in her veins rebelled. She went to the theatre every evening on the sly ; she got the tickets from the old actress—her name was Miss Fuchs—and, as we heard later, she did not stay in the audience, but slipped behind the scenes. I often heard her whispering to herself in the daytime, and once I heard her talking quite loudly under my window, when she should have been picking up pears. And I raised myself a little in bed, and saw her standing under the tree with outstretched arms ; the beautiful bergamots had fallen from her apron, and she cried loudly : 'I am a captive ! I am in chains !' and then something else about a fisher and a boat which could have saved her. I really thought she was out of her mind. If only I had not been so miserable, I could have kept it off until her parents came—but——

"One day the whole house smelled as though preparations were being made for a festival ; the child brought me some waffles in the afternoon with my coffee, and said it could not be wrong, she had such a longing for them. An hour later, I heard a clattering of cups and talking in the house, but Ernestine said boldly that it was only a few girl friends of the young lady, and I believed her. Unfortunately Mrs. Schmidt was ill at the time, and could not trouble herself about Martha ; so everything came about so easily. One day, to my delight, I read in the paper that the actors were to give a play as farewell performance, and thought : Oh, well, the one time can have done no harm,

and it is good that old Miss Fuchs is going away. That she and the child had been together every evening, that even the first lover, as they called him, had been in our pastor's study, where no impious word had been heard since the memory of man, and had rehearsed plays with the child—good heavens! I never dreamed of such a thing as I lay on my sick-bed.

“The day before the troupe left the city a letter came from Bonn, announcing Mr. and Mrs. Steinkopf's return for the next day. I breathed more freely.

“It was October now, and I told Ernestine to bring branches of fir-trees from the forest and make garlands, and Martha to make her father's favorite cake. ‘Yes, yes,’ was the answer, and toward evening the child came into my room; the moon was shining in at the window, and I could see quite plainly her dear fair face, the golden hair, and great, dark eyes.

“‘Come here, my little dear,’ I said; ‘sit down by me. Are you not glad, very glad, that your parents are coming home?’

“She had seated herself on my bed with her face turned to the window, but she did not say a word.

“‘Martha, child,’ said I teasingly, ‘you are so different from what you used to be. Are you in love with any one? Oh, that will be fine when we have a wedding here in the old parsonage; and that day will come, even as to-day did.’

“Then she laughed sharply. ‘Would any one want to marry me, the actor's child, whose father was in prison?’

“‘Oh, Martha, do you still think of that? Has not the dear God given you the best parents in the world?’

“‘Of course, Katharine; it is only that one can never be happy except in her own fashion.’

“‘You will be happy some day, my treasure.’

“ ‘That I will, Katharine !’ she cried loudly, and her eyes sparkled. ‘That I will !’

“ ‘Then she threw her arms around my neck and said : ‘Dear Katharine, do you still pray for me every evening as you used to when I was little ?’

“ ‘Yes, my darling, of course ; every evening, always.’

“ ‘Then do so in future, dear Katharine, please, please.’

“ ‘And then she kissed me once more, and a hot drop fell upon my face, and before I could think, she was gone.’

The old woman now sobbed loudly.

“ ‘Ma’am,” she gasped out, “when I learned from Ernestine the next morning that she had gone out in the world—into misery, terror and pain and anxiety so overcame me that that evening I lay on my bed perfectly unconscious, and that lasted for weeks. I did not know what her parents said when they found the nest empty. I do not know how great a commotion it excited in the city, or whether the pastor took steps to bring her back ; I know nothing about it, nothing at all. When I came to my senses, snow lay on the roofs, and the winter sun shone through the frosty panes of my window, and down in the sitting-room sat the mistress, staring out upon the street, very quiet and calm, and her hair was as white as the snow outside. I heard no word of reproach, and when I wished to speak of it, the pastor signed to me to be silent.”

A long pause ensued ; I rose and went to the window to close it, for the night air was cool. Then I stood and gazed out. Yes, I had thought something of the kind would happen. Her inherited blood, the love for this vagabond life—now so gay, now so fearfully serious, had made itself felt. Was it so strange ? There is a charm in the word “theatre,” a magic, which carries away every young heart, and especially an actor’s child. Art ! Art ! and were the stage ever so mean, were the temple but an

old barn, Art holds out her hands over this misery and makes it alluring. I myself, when a girl, had wished to become an actress, although I had seen the devotees of Thalia but a single time in the tavern of my native village, when they gave "Minna von Barnheim." Even to-day, that evening stands in my remembrance as one of the most delightful of my life. Poor little Martha ! did you, as old Katharine said, have to do what you did ? Poor Elizabeth ! who remained solitary in her old days, whose love and care had been so in vain.

I leaned my head against the cool window-panes, and bit my handkerchief to keep from sobbing aloud.

Then there was a cough behind me. "Madame," said old Katharine, "I only want to ask you if you could not speak a few kind words to the child. She has heard that you are here, and thinks you could help her—she would not let me go until——"

"What ?" I asked, breathlessly ; "Martha is here !"

"Yes, with the actors ; up-stairs in the attic, ma'am. That is why I came to you."

I stood speechless, while the old woman continued shyly : "The poor thing thinks the director would consent, if you asked him, that she need not play here——"

"She is to play here ? She is here with this troupe ?"

"Yes, ma'am."

I began to pace up and down the room.

"For heaven's sake, Elizabeth must not have that to bear ; send for her," I said. "What does she call herself now ?"

"By her mother's name—Tosca von Korinska. Ah, you see, ma'am——"

"Very well, Katharine, bring Miss Tosca von Korinska."

The old woman left the room. She may have taken

my excitement for pride, whereas it was simply embarrassment. How was I to treat her who was now to come into my presence? I had held her in my arms, had hugged and kissed her, had called her my darling, my sweet child; but how am I to treat her now, when she has deceived the woman who is dear to me as a sister? I ring the bell and order a lamp brought, for I wish to see her plainly, and then I pace up and down my room; it is a long time before she comes.

At last there is a knock, and upon my "Come in," the door slowly opens, and across the threshold comes some one whom I know, whom I saw years before, down under the linden-tree, among the singing students, only she whom I see to-day is younger and more beautiful. We stand opposite each other in silence. She gazes at the floor, and is very pale. She wears a creamy cashmere gown. Evidently she has first put on the dress she may wear in modern comedies on the stage, before coming. It has cheap lace at the throat and wrists, and looks as though it had been pulled out of a trunk a few minutes before, it is so mussed. But her golden hair is still arranged in the old simple fashion on her beautifully shaped head, and the two magnificent braids hang down her back, just as when I saw little Martha on the beach, and rejoiced in her. This childish simplicity is in strange contrast to the modern, cheap costume.

This is Martha Steinkopf.

I do not know what to say to her. Half actress, half distinguished lady; half woman, half child. How old is she? Oh, yes, twenty, but with the ideas of a sixteen-year-old girl. I feel quite strangely, face to face with this riddle.

"Aunt Anna!" says she at last.

I cannot answer. As I am silent, she raises her eyes,

which are filled with tears, and her face wears a tender, pleading look.

"Martha," I say, with difficulty restraining my emotion, "I had fancied our meeting would be different."

"Oh, Aunt Anna, if you knew——"

"Sit down, and tell me what you wish of me."

"Aunt Anna," she begins quickly, "I cannot play here; I think I should go mad. I cannot bear the thought that the Borndorfers will come in streams to see the pastor's Martha on the stage. I cannot play, remembering my father and mother, my innocent, happy childhood—I—cannot!"

She had buried her face in her hands, and wept. "Aunt Anna, for mother's sake, go to the manager—you are wealthy—buy permission from him for me not to play—I cannot!"

"You are no longer the pastor's Martha, poor child——"

"Yes," she cries, "*here* I am, in recollection of the past. Oh, aunt, every stone here knows me, every tree in the forest; and every window in the houses seems to gaze at me reproachfully, oh—and the people! And, aunt, if father reads to-morrow what is printed on the bills—aunt, they must not be distributed!"

"What is printed on them?"

With a trembling hand she gives me a programme. Faust—Margaret—again three stars, and I read:

"This talented young tragedian is not unknown to the estimable people of our art-loving city. A year and a half ago, she lived within these walls as the cherished and beloved adopted child of one of our first citizens. Her in-born love of art—she is the daughter of that incomparably beautiful young actress who found a sudden death here at the hand of her jealous husband—drew her from her peaceful but narrow life here. Like almost every great

genius, she must first burst her chains before she acquired her liberty, but she has been splendidly rewarded," etc., etc.

There was a long paragraph chanting her praises.

"Where is the manager?" I ask.

"I will take you to him, Aunt Anna—oh, I thank you!"

I climbed a badly lighted flight of stairs, which, however, was only too well known to me. Two men met us on the stairs. A small, fat, jovial-looking man cried, without being embarrassed by my presence: "Ah, the pastor's daughter in white! Where are you going, my little dear? To the old man again? Do not show yourself to him, he is furious with you."

The other, a tall, slight young man, whose face, as far as I could judge in the dim light, was of an ideal type, somewhat resembling the portrait of the youthful Byron, drew back, hat in hand, to let us pass.

"Do not be so foolish, Martha," he murmured, and looked at her angrily.

"Is he up-stairs?" said she, instead of answering.

He nodded shortly and stared at me with a cool, almost hostile gaze.

"Who are the two, Martha?"

"The little one—our comedian."

"And the other, Martha?"

"The first lover," she stammered.

"And they call you by your first name?"

She flushed crimson. "We all call each other by our first names," said she; "it is the custom."

In the next moment I stood before the stern director in the little attic room; she had remained outside.

"My dear madame," he replied to my petition, "you surely would not ask that—but madame cannot judge our circumstances. Suppose it rains to-morrow, and Miss Martha Steinkopf, who for various reasons excites—must

excite, great interest in this city, what is the consequence ? The house sold out ! My dear madame, you might as well ask a farmer not to bring in his hay for some absurd reason, although the sun shone."

"I offer you compensation, sir."

He smiled, and gazed at me from his half-shut gray eyes. He stood there like a poor imitation of Friedrich Haase in some comedy rôle, his left hand thrust in his vest, the other resting upon the table. "I am incapable of even approximating the damages which might ensue, madame ; besides, with the best intentions, I could not replace her in this rôle. Madame must do us the honor of witnessing the child's acting."

"Thank you ! But if Miss Tosca were to become ill, how then, director ?"

"Oh, that trick is played out. She cannot feign illness every evening for six weeks ; she must come on the stage here some time, and the sooner the better. Besides, I have been to the physician and warned him against such a case. Let her play here ; later, if your heart yearns for Miss Tosca von Korinska, I will give her into your hands without asking for compensation."

He laughed, looked at his watch, and shifted several pamphlets on the table.

"What does that mean ?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "That she will never amount to anything in her life," said he, contemptuously. "She has not a spark of talent, no fire, not a suspicion of how to act."

"She is quite without talent ?" I asked breathlessly.

"Quite !" he replied. "How could it be otherwise ? Her original talent has been suffocated by the tobacco smoke of the pastor's study. She has not even ordinary talent—the manners of a nun instead of naïve freshness,

and in tragic scenes a martyred expression ; impossible for the stage, quite impossible. Her mother, whom she so resembles—ah, she had spirit—she would have become a star of the first magnitude.”

“ But, sir, if that is so——”

“ She *must* play here, madame. Her contract runs until June, and here her name will fill the house as though she were a celebrity.”

“ If, sir, you will accede to my wish and dissolve the contract at once, I will give you three thousand marks,” said I coolly. “ You may send me your decision this evening. Good day !”

It seemed to me that the man’s respectful bow was no bad sign. He accompanied me to the door, and said : “ Good day, Baroness. I should like to oblige you—but——”

“ Good day, sir !”

She still sat on the stairs, on the same place where I had seen her, a sweet little child, for the first time. “ Come with me to my room,” I said. There I began : “ I hope he will consent, Martha ; do not despair. Besides, one cannot possibly drag you on the stage by the hair of your head. As I say, I think he will release you, and then you will go away with me to-morrow morning. And listen, my girl ; because you were dear to Elizabeth, I will take you home with me—of course, with the agreement—the manager tells me that your contract runs to June——”

I paused suddenly. The girl’s hands had fallen at her side, and her black eyes flashed at me.

“ I will not,” said she roughly, “ for I love my art. I love it above everything. I should not have remained with this troupe at any rate. I am going to the Royal Theatre at D——. His Highness himself promised me that I should be engaged.”

“Child,” I cried in horror, “do you know what it means to be in favor with this prince?”

“No,” she replied. “His Highness came behind the scenes and vowed and promised that——”

“Did your acting please him so greatly?” I asked ironically.

“Yes,” said she proudly, “and I know I acted well that evening. No, aunt,” she continued, coming up to me with clasped hands, “do not think that I despise my profession. I am enthusiastic about it. I would not give it up for all the luxuries which I would have with you, nor for all the kindness with which you would bear with me. I am an artist, body and soul. Only here, *here* I cannot play. I should be paralyzed. Oh, aunt, have pity! What shall I do? I cannot inflict that upon my parents!”

“And yet you could inflict far more upon them,” said I severely. “Do you know that your adopted mother has become a victim to melancholia—and that your father, who loved you as his own child, has become a broken man?”

“Oh, aunt, I will give my life to make it good to them, but not my art!”

I shrugged my shoulders. What could I say?

“You are angry with me, aunt,” she stammered. “You do not approve of my profession!” And in a voice husky with tears, she continued: “There are hours in which I almost die of longing for my parents, for the dear old house. How often I am there in my dreams! Aunt, do not cast me off altogether. Tell my parents I have remained virtuous. I will study and strive to make progress. And when I have reached the level toward which I aspire, then I will come and beg you all for forgiveness. Aunt, every calling can be honorable.”

She had come close to me, and made a movement as though she would lay her blonde head on my shoulder, and

say, "Auntie, darling auntie," as she used to do. In her great speaking eyes there was a longing for tenderness and love, but she did not venture to touch me. Finally, I drew her in my arms and petted her, and she began to weep.

She is still so young, so full of ideals ; there is still something of her pious childhood about her, when she sat on her father's knee and looked at the picture Bible, or beside her mother, who guided the knitting needles in her little hands. There is still the down on the peach, but for how long ?

"At least, do not go to the Royal Theatre in D——, Martha," said I, more roughly than I had intended. "I mean well with you. Rather remain with your travelling company."

She started up. "You think I am not talented enough, aunt ?"

"Not that. The women who are engaged there are—well, I should not like you to be thrown with them."

She was silent for a while, as though frightened. "Oh, aunt," said she then, "now I understand you, but I am safe from that. I must submit to be talked about. I have adopted a life of publicity, but I wish I could tell you what a strong safeguard I have in the memory of my parents, and besides——"

"Remember what Emilia Galotti says when she begs her father's dagger, that she may kill herself."

"Yes, aunt, I have played Emilia, but you do not know——" She has flushed crimson, and looks down, then she throws her arm around my neck again and kisses me as though she would force back with this kiss a confession which trembled on her lips. "Aunt," she whispered at last, "I wish you could see me play once. I know you have good judgment."

"I do not wish to see you, Martha ; it would pain me

too much. Now go ; I am weary." She gazes at me with such a tender, pleading look, kisses my hand, and leaves the room. Indeed, I feel scarcely able to speak.

When she is gone I take my shawl. I must have air. The garden behind the house will be empty in such weather ; to be sure, it is still raining. So I make use of the bowling alley as a walk. The dark garden is really quite deserted, the elder is very fragrant, the air is cool and refreshing to my hot brow. Gradually my eyes become accustomed to the darkness. I plainly distinguish the blackboard against the wall of the alley in which I am pacing up and down, recognize the trees and the black masses of the houses beyond the garden, which rise like terraces ; yonder tall roof must be that of the parsonage.

"Poor Elizabeth !"

I pause at the end of the alley, lean against one of the wooden columns which are meant to lend the building the appearance of a hall, and gaze out.

"Poor Elizabeth !" I repeat. How long I have stood there, absorbed in my thoughts, I do not know, when I hear footsteps and whispering—the passionate, unintelligible words in a man's voice, first. They must be on the other side of the thicket, and now a woman's voice answers—it is Martha ! "Do not torture me so terribly !" she says, and her voice sounds weary.

"I torture you ?" he cries. "You torment yourself and me ! Do you think it is happiness for me to watch your hesitation, to see that you would prefer to flee to the parsonage this evening, barefooted, and with ashes on your head ? Pray go, go, but never say again that art is sacred to you ; never again put your arms around my neck and tell me that now, for the first time, you know what it is to live, now that the temple of art is open to you, now—that you love. Go back to the old suffocating atmosphere, and dust

the books in your father's study, sit properly by the window, and draw your needle in and out of the linen. See how this narrow life will please you now, after you have enjoyed golden liberty. I tell you, you will learn to envy the miserable woman who goes from place to place with marionettes."

"I do love you, Waldemar, and I love my art; you know best how dearly. But here, *here*—believe me, I cannot play here," she defended herself tearfully.

"You cannot!" the man burst out. "You *will* not. Pray, say so frankly. If I am to believe that you love me, prove it by showing to the whole world that you are above these narrow-minded Philistines, that your calling is a serious matter to you, that you are a true artist. Show it by your acting; come before them proudly, and you will see how they will applaud you."

"Waldemar, you are right a thousand times, but my parents——"

"Well, is not a pastor half an actor?" he asked bitterly. "Does he not come before the public, and speak the same as you and I, as do thousands of artists every evening? Where is the difference? Is not the stage also a means of educating the people, as well as is the pulpit? Do not the great minds who wrote our dramas waken morality and goodness in men—eh, Tosca? What have you to say to that? Were you engaged at the Royal Theatre, in Berlin where thousands applauded you each evening, citizens here would take the horses from your carriage, and draw you along in triumph; and your adopted parents would be proud of you, and give you their blessing. But you are ashamed of your lowly beginning, of the travelling company, and forget that the way to the summit of fame leads over thorns and thistles. Your enthusiasm, your strength, is not sufficient. Go to your patroness who

wishes to buy off the director ; let her take you back into the shallow water from which you were so glad to escape ; forget what you have experienced, and do not trouble yourself as to what is to become of me. I must do without——”

Hasty steps rushed down the path. Then a cry, as from a poor, tormented heart : “Waldemar, do not go !”

A light figure ran after the man behind the dark bushes, and in the next moment, not three feet away from me, she held him in her arms, speechless, sobbing.

“You will stay with us?” he asked, threateningly and yet tenderly, while I drew behind the pillar, as far back into the darkness as I could.

“Yes, yes !” she sobbed.

“With me, Tosca ?”

“Yes—always !”

“And you will play to-morrow ?”

“Yes !” she cried out, “because you wish it.”

Then he raised her in his arms violently, and kissed her as though he would suffocate her, and he hurried past me with his beautiful burden, almost running. I heard the garden gate close, and then all was quiet. I clutched my forehead, and shook my head. Will she—will she really play? But, of course, as matters are—oh, the unhappy child !

Now the notes of a piano, fearfully out of tune, ring in my ears, coming from the garden room, while not at all a bad tenor voice sings the sad little song of Koschat :

“Deserted, deserted, deserted am I——”

Incapable of listening longer, I return to the house and to my room.

On the table, near the lamp, lies a note. I open it, and laugh as I read it. In most polite words, the director

informs me that he has finally decided to dispense with Miss Korinska's services in case madame is willing—and now comes a demand, which cannot be excelled in boldness.

Well, Martha has decided ; this affair is arranged. To be sure, I have heard nothing from her, I only overheard her words to another ; and I will assure her that I am ready to do everything—for Elizabeth's sake—to buy her off from appearing here. With the note in my hand, I climb the stairs to the upper story. The lamp up there has gone out, and I have difficulty in finding the door of the attic room which Martha occupies. Without hesitation, I turn the knob and enter. The girl sits on the edge of the bed, half undressed, and has unbraided her hair to comb it. At this moment she reminds me so vividly of the charming child of former days who would come from the beach with loosened golden waves of hair, while Elizabeth would pull at my dress as soon as I tried to express my admiration at the sight.

"Aunt !" she cries confusedly, and springs up.

"Well, child, I bring you some good news," say I. "The director will consent to an agreement—you need not play."

She has hastily taken her white gown from a chair and hangs it up. When she turns her face to me again, it is crimson and her eyes look past me. "Oh, aunt !" is all that she says : she tries to speak, but cannot. I can recognize her mental conflict in her twitching face.

"Well, Martha !" I ask, "did you understand me ? You need not play. It only depends upon us."

She bows her head, and clasps and unclasps her hands.

"Aunt," says she, scarce audibly, "pardon me for troubling you. I have changed my mind ; I will play."

“You will play, Martha? What has made you change your mind so soon?”

Her pale lips move, but they do not utter a word.

I turn abruptly to go, but she holds me fast by the gown and kneels before me. “Aunt, do not go like this—do not go like this—I must play, do not ask me—I *must*.” She cries this quite desperately, and crawling after me on her knees, she continues breathlessly: “Ah, do not curse me; I *can* not do otherwise, I *must* play. It was so wrong for me to refuse; they must all see that I did not run away for love of adventure, that I am in earnest with my profession. ‘Wholly, or not at all,’ father always said. “Oh, God! what can I say, that you may forgive me?”

“Bethink yourself, Martha; you always confided in me!”

Again her tearful face flushes deeply. She lowers her head, and, as though she were ashamed, draws one of the golden locks of her hair over her face like a veil.

“Well, Martha, have you, besides your love of your art, no other reason for the terrible sorrow you will cause your adopted parents?”

She remains immovable. “No!” she finally whispers.

“Then good-by, child!”

I free myself from her hastily, and the door-knob slips from my hand, so that the door bangs loudly and the walls echo. I hear her once more cry within the room: “Aunt, oh, aunt!” But I am so excited that the mournful sound does not touch my heart. Down-stairs I seat myself at the table, and write to the manager that I regret that I cannot accept his offer, as Miss Tosca von Korinska is now firmly resolved to appear to-morrow evening.

For a long time I wander around the room and tell myself again and again: “Martha is lost!” I imagine her married to her lover, and travelling with him from one

place to another, in hunger and misery, her passion for art vanishing with necessity and anxiety, and her artificially formed enthusiasm dying into ashes so soon, ah ! so soon. And how she will pine for her childhood's peaceful life. They are fearful scenes which rise to my mind. And then I see her again, laughing in spite of the sadness of this life ; she has stripped off her purity and goodness ; she takes life as it comes, with all its wretchedness and evil ; she has become like her mother—unendurable thought.

Is there no help ? May she not really become an artist, a great, gifted artist ? Have not our first actresses risen from insignificance, from the school of a travelling company ?

I resolve to go to see her play to-morrow ; I will smooth her path for her if she has even a spark of talent. Suddenly I remember with joy my acquaintance with the director of the Royal Theatre in B——, and resolve to introduce the child to him ; I will do everything for her. I will be good to her. Have I a right to demand to know her sweetest secret ? Is it an unheard-of thing that a beautiful fiery girl should love ? Shall I make more difficult this poor child's path, which at best will be full of thorns and nettles ?

I blame myself severely, and ask myself : “ Anna, was that your boasted patience, when you left the poor child in anger ? ” And the scene rises so plainly before my eyes—the little attic room, the beautiful creature, her magnificent golden hair floating around her, sitting on the edge of the narrow bed. I see her anxious eyes, the tears on her flushed cheeks. I see the withered laurel wreath on the white-washed wall of the poor room, and the broad pink ribbon hanging down. This scene is like a chapter from a romance. And half asleep, I whisper : “ You poor child, wait—I will help you ; I will speak to Mr. Steinkopf for

you—he will forgive you ; perhaps your father's blessing will bring you good fortune."

Then I wake. The director's words ring in my ears : "She has not a spark of talent !"—bah ! the man depreciates her talent merely because she wishes to leave his company. Ah, heavens ! That unfortunate engagement at the court theatre !

Now I am wide awake. I will speak to her *fiancé*. "She must not go there !" I say half aloud and firmly, and then I lose myself in plans for the child's future, and finally fall asleep.

The next morning I awoke quite late. On the table near my bed stood a dewy fresh bouquet of May-flowers—evidently Martha had been in the room.

As I drew aside the curtains, I saw a cloudy rainy sky, the mountains in the distance wrapped in mist. Before I finished dressing, I wrote a letter to Mr. Steinkopf and sent it off at once. And as I prepared to go to church, the answer came that he would call that afternoon. Elizabeth had one of her bad days, and my appearance might shock her.

I went to church with umbrella and waterproof, and as the pastor entered the chancel, I had difficulty in recognizing in those grief-stricken features the old face ; and the voice, too, sounds differently. It is no Whitsun sermon which is preached to the congregation. The text is : "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." He spoke of the gloominess and sadness of earth ; described the condition of people, their relations to each other. A sad picture was presented—a state of misery and evil depicted in glowing colors. The faithlessness, the lovelessness, the ingratitude of men, he dwelt upon particularly. There was scarcely a sound in the crowded church.

"But the Holy Ghost, the Comforter," he continued, "must punish the world for its sins, must proclaim the truth, before He can comfort. We do not like to hear the truth, we like to be deceived, to drink deeply from the intoxicating cup of temptation."

The congregation was not accustomed to hear the preacher, usually so mild, speak of punishment; this could be seen from their faces. When, in the second part of his sermon, he spoke of the peace which was poured out to-day upon all peoples, he spoke wearily; it seemed as though his strength was gone.

I returned sadly to my inn. It still rained. I could scarcely make my way between all the vehicles which stood in the courtyard. The inn was full of people. My room being not yet in order, the chambermaid excused herself with the many guests who had come for the theatrical performance.

"That is because of the bad weather, ma'am, and then because the young lady is to play."

"Send Miss von Korinska to me."

"She is at rehearsal; I will tell her as soon as she comes from there."

Shortly before two, Martha enters my room. I scarcely recognize her. In the bright light she looks fairly old; her eyes are dull, and surrounded by dark rings.

I ask her kindly whether she will dine with me, for I pity her. She sits down, but does not eat—only drinks two glasses of wine, which send a flush to her cheeks. Her toilet is untidy, as yesterday, but I have not the heart to reprove her.

The director, at my request, has reserved for me the little proscenium box. I tell Martha; she changes color. "I think I cannot play as usual to-night," is her answer. I speak of my plan to have her thoroughly trained for her

profession. She looks at me gratefully, but makes no reply.

Beneath my windows now ring out loud hurrahs. A wagonful of students has driven up. They seem already somewhat intoxicated, and demand a dining-room. Host and waiter stand among the rain-wet fellows. Laughing, they finally all enter the house.

The waiter soon after appears, excuses himself to me, and then turns to Martha with a smile. "The young gentlemen have invited all the members of your company to dinner, miss."

She turns pale. "Thank you, I have already dined," says she, and her eyes flash scornfully.

"But they threatened to hang me if I did not bring you back with me, miss," says he, and smiling knowingly, he adds: "And Mr. Raimund, too, said he hoped that miss would come."

She looks at him angrily, and points to the door. When he has gone, she turns from me and goes to the window.

"Who is Mr. Raimund?" I ask.

"The 'lover' of our company," says she in a smothered voice.

"Has he a right to send you such a message?" I ask remorselessly.

"No!" says she shortly, and presses her forehead against the cold, damp window-pane.

When she turns at last, she complains of weakness, and says she will rest awhile, and also has something to do to her costume. Old Miss Fuchs does not understand about it, and probably after dining would be incapable of sewing. She goes, after kissing my hand, and I say:

"Child, have courage."

At the moment she enters the hall, a shrill-voiced woman cries: "I suppose you think it wrong to amuse yourself

on Whitsunday? Always exclusive, always prudish; you will see what will come of it. Raimund is quite angry with you. Do not draw the lines too tight with him—they might break! You are no better than the rest of us.”

“Old Katharine!” I think, “this time your philosophy is at fault, for here, angels and demons fight for a poor human heart.”

In the afternoon the pastor writes me that his assistant had suddenly been taken ill, and consequently he is so overburdened with duties that he cannot keep his promise. Will it be convenient for me to see him that evening?

I answer: “No, but to-morrow at any time.”

The evening finally approaches. As the distance is quite long, I set out at a quarter of six. In the park, under the dripping trees—the rain has ceased—there is quite a crowd. All flock to the theatre. Near me murmurs the little stream; the water is muddy to-day, and has risen to the top of the banks, while it rushes by quickly, so that one could actually become dizzy from gazing down at it. A few students, their faces flushed with drink, hurry past me. I hear one say: “The deuce! look at the people. The Temple of the Muses is decidedly too small to-day; there will be a jam!”

From my box, the door of which I lock—I purchased the right to do so from the director, for a nice little sum—I see that every seat in the house is already taken, and the thought occurs to me: Will not the gallery—there is but one—and the dress circle give way, and crash down upon the heads of the unfortunates in the parquet? The little theatre is so rickety, it should have been pulled down years before. Everywhere are laughing faces, curious glances; only in the midst of the dress circle is the empty ducal box, whose curtains of

faded red velvet are held together by the ducal coronet. Every other seat is occupied, and more and more people flock in. Scolding voices are heard. In the orchestra, among the musicians, who can scarcely move, sit the lively students. Most glances are turned to where sit the dignitaries of Borndorf: stately, corpulent women, whose faces now express contempt and scorn; pretty young girls with anxious, curious, or satisfied looks, and in the background the gentlemen, armed with opera glasses.

At last a bell rings, the musicians play as overture a selection from the "Flying Dutchman" until it seems as if one's ears would split, then the curtain rises, and Faust's study is presented to view. Whether Faust—I recognize the young actor who met me yesterday on the steps, and on the play-bill is Mr. Raimund's name—plays his part well, I cannot tell. I have but one thought: Martha. The director plays Mephistopheles, and the part could not be played better. The words rush by my ears as the stream outside rushes on. Once, during a pause, I even think I can hear this rushing of the stream. And it is true. I remember that not far from here the waves rush over a dam.

Gradually the air has become suffocatingly hot. Some lamps have been turned too high, and the smoke almost takes my breath away.

Finally a pause—or is it the second? The orchestra plays the Faust waltz. Suddenly my heart seems to rise in my throat. I cannot look at the stage. Then familiar words ring in my ears:

"My fair young lady, will it offend——"

Now I look; there she stands and gazes at Faust, her head turned aside. Never in my life have I seen a more

lovely Gretchen : the character is seldom such an embodiment of innocence in looks and carriage. But her answer does not sound curt and repellent. She speaks the words dully, nor does she walk away with quick, elastic step, as an insulted girl would. Slowly, as though she could not lift her feet, she staggers across the stage ; the train of her sky-blue dress, with the brown velvet band on the edge, drags slowly after her. I see, as though in a dream, the slender figure with the beautiful blonde braids ; it seems to me an eternity before she disappears. There is whispering all around me, and from among the students comes even a single "Bravo !"

I can scarcely breathe. What will happen ? Is it shame which so paralyzes her ? Is she ill ? The scene comes in which she stands before the mirror and braids her hair ; again the voice is like that of a talking doll, the gestures those of an automaton. But now she seems to control herself ; she is fairly bewitching as she finds the jewels and adorns herself before the mirror. Suddenly she glances at my box ; she breaks off in the middle of a scene ; it seems as though she would fain support herself as she clinches her hands.

"That may all be—"

she repeats.

"Very well and good,"

cries the prompter, so that the whole theatre can hear, and she goes on.

I smile at her.

"Bravo !" cries a student ; the others begin to applaud, and a coarse, loud laugh comes from the gallery.

"Silence !" cries some one in the parquet.

The scene with Mephistopheles, Martha, and Gretchen drags on. Only once does the latter's face change,

and with overwhelming truth the words come from her lips :

“ Alas, that mortals so unhappy are ! ”

Then she comes in on Faust's arm. In looks she is wholly the timid child who loves for the first time, but her acting is shy and lifeless. It seems to me now that Faust is dissatisfied with his partner ; several times he whispers to her hastily, and for a moment a gloomy look replaces the prescribed expression of rapture on his face. In vain she says, in a weary voice :

“ I feel too well, a man of so much mind
In my poor talk can little pleasure find.”

Barely her finger tips rest on the man's arm. The other couple pass on, and Gretchen once more comes to the front. Faust says :

“ And thou forgiv'st that liberty of late,
That impudence of mine so daring,
As thou wast home from church repairing ? ”

And she answers :

“ I was confused, the like was new to me ;
No one could say a word to my dishonor.”

“ Nothing, except that you were somewhat infatuated with an actor,” growls a coarse voice from the gallery, and at that moment it seems as though the storm broke loose—a furious hissing and cat-calling, the tramp of hundreds of feet. The police rush in, and vainly try to call the people to order. There is an indescribable confusion. The Borndorfers are avenging their pastor ; the students, their declined invitation.

Gretchen has vanished from the stage, I did not see how. Only Mephistopheles stands there, and vainly tries to speak. As he does not succeed, the curtain falls. The dress circle has been emptied ; the respectable audience

leaves the parquet. Only I cannot move ; I sit there as if under a spell, and hear the noise.

“Go on ! Bravo ! *Da capo!*” Hisses and calls.

Finally I rouse myself and go out into the corridor. The door to the stage is open ; I go down the little flight of steps and stand behind the scenes. Mephistopheles is raging ; the girl lies in the arms of an old woman, breathing heavily, great drops of sweat on her brow. She looks past me ; she is deaf to the director’s insults. She only stares fixedly at Faust, who stands in front of her, in his shabby, purple velvet costume, pale under his paint, trembling with rage and passion.

“You shall go on, you shall go on at once !” cries the director meanwhile.

She stretches out her hands to the man who only yesterday had embraced her and kissed her. Then something shining flies into her lap, and Faust turns away ; the little shining object rolls from the folds of her gown to the floor and partly across the stage, and stops near the prompter’s box. It is a plain gold ring. All this occupied but a second’s time, scarcely any one saw it ; only the girl’s eyes, which have become more and more staring, followed it.

The director, who may have seen that she was unable to play, thinks he has found the proper moment to hurl his scorn unrestrainedly in her face.

“You do well, Miss Tosca, to leave the stage—forever. I think you would scarcely amount to mediocrity. You can go to-day, if you like ; the salary due you——”

“Sir, I beg you ;” I interrupted him furiously ; “do you not see that she is ill ?”

“Madame,” he hissed, “you have nothing to do here.”

A policeman told me that I must go, as no one but the company was allowed on the stage. In a moment I find myself in the lobby of the theatre.

The audience inside still rages. I can do nothing but get my cloak from the box and go away. As I go out into the dark night, it is at first impossible to see anything, but at last I find the way. On this side of the building it is quite deserted. I did not choose the main entrance. The stream falls over the dam, so I turn to the right, to make a circuit of the building; the lights from the stage shine out into the darkness.

Then it seems to me that a door opens behind me, and I turn. Did not something light just then vanish into the darkness? I pause, but my eyes cannot pierce it; but for an instant I fancy that I hear above the rushing stream a human voice's cry.

"Nonsense," I say, "I am excited." I force myself to be calm, to go on. The night-wind rustles through the tall tree-tops above me, the water at my side gurgles and murmurs so strangely. Have I taken a wrong path? It is quite lonely here, and terror and foreboding come over me—a terrible foreboding.

Behind me I hear hurried steps; a man with a lantern comes running after. I hear his panting breath, in spite of wind and water.

"What has happened?" I cry, exerting all my strength.

He calls something to me, but I do not understand a word.

Trembling with excitement, I arrive at the inn—who knows how long I have been on the way? The host stands in the hall, surrounded by a crowd; as he sees me, he comes up to me.

"Madame need not be disturbed," he says, "she will be taken to the vault in the churchyard at once."

I go on—I do not need to ask *who* is to be taken at once to the vault in the churchyard.

Old Katharine is waiting for me outside my door; the old

woman sobs pitifully. "Madame," she cries, "forgive her ; she could not help herself !"

"Ah, Katharine," I say, "another must judge here !"

She gazes at my face, and goes away sobbing. She may see that I cannot speak. But in my room stands the pastor. We press each other's hands silently ; he can weep.

"I loved her very dearly," he says. "Had she but come to me, had she thrown herself in Elizabeth's arms, instead of those of death, we would have forgiven her a thousand times."

"And Elizabeth ?" I ask.

"She suspects nothing ; she never speaks of her, but she has often expressed a wish to see you, Anna. Pray come to-morrow morning. You will find a sweet, quiet martyr who has no longer a wish upon earth."

The old knocker on the door of the parsonage rattles as it used to ; an elderly maid takes me to Mrs. Steinkopf's room, and from her seat by the window rises a dainty little figure, and beneath her snow-white hair shine the dear blue eyes of my Elizabeth.

"This is sweet of you, Anna," says she quite calmly ; "nice that you come ; you will stay with me for a little while ?" She takes off my hat and cloak, and orders some refreshments. I sit opposite her as I used to do, and gaze out upon the street and the old church. We speak of our youth, we speak of her three darlings in the churchyard ; she says she would be so glad to die, to find rest and peace, but not a word of Martha. Nor is there a picture of her anywhere, or anything that could remind one of her.

We go into the garden, and wander up and down under the linden-trees in silence for a while. I fancy that-I must see a light dress, blonde hair shining behind the bushes, or that a girlish laugh will break the dreamy silence of this old garden. Nothing of the sort. The garden is almost

uncannily solitary, only the hum of innumerable bees is heard in the blooming lindens above us.

Then Elizabeth asks me if I will help her make a wreath. And she plucks ivy leaves from the old wall, and white roses, with a faint pink tinge, from a bush which is covered with them, and they are as delicate as the face of a young girl. And as we sit in the garden, and I hand her the flowers, she says suddenly :

“Anna, you must not think that I know nothing. I know *all*, only I do not wish to speak to my husband of it. He loved the child so dearly, and for this reason I dare not weep. He will overcome it easier.” And she nods to me pleasantly, though the corners of her mouth twitch. “Will you take her that from me?” she asks, when we have finished the wreath ; “it is a greeting from the garden of her youth.”

I try to speak, but she will not let me.

“Never mind, Anna ; she is saved from the wild life. She will be forgiven for seeking her home before she was summoned. I have forgiven her all.” And drawing a long breath, she adds : “Something like peace has come over me since I know that she sleeps.” She lays down the wreath. “It must keep fresh until you go, Anna.”

“She did not go without bidding me farewell, Anna,” Elizabeth begins again. “Night before last, as I could not sleep with anxiety and heartache, because I had learned during the day that she had come here with the company, and was to play here, I rose and went to the window of my bedroom. It must have been about midnight, and the moon shone out from behind the clouds. At first I saw only the old pear-tree on the lawn. It was oppressively warm in the room, and I opened the window. It was a wonderfully beautiful night, but close as though before a thunderstorm, and the nightingales were singing every-

where. Suddenly I saw a figure leaning against the trunk of the tree, and gradually I distinguished a white arm thrown round the trunk, and the white face and bright hair above. And I saw how her eyes gazed fixedly at me. Motionless, as though carved out of marble, she stood there, and I stood equally spellbound at my window, and thus we gazed at each other, for how long I do not know.

“What thoughts rushed to my mind during these moments, Anna! It all seemed so strange to me, as though it were no longer our old garden—as though an abyss yawned between the house and the tree. I longed to raise my arms, and could not, to cry: ‘Come back! come back!’ But it seemed impossible; how could she have crossed the chasm? And as I stood there, and felt the perspiration standing in great drops on my brow, and was yet incapable of moving, and saw only the silent, longing gaze, the arm was removed from the tree, and the figure, still with head turned toward me, went across the moonlit lawn. Now I could recognize her so plainly, as she must have recognized me, feature for feature, and then she disappeared behind the bushes in the direction of the garden wall. I heard her climb over the low wall—she so often did that as a child—heard the rolling of little stones, and light steps dying away in the distance, and then I could call: ‘Martha! Martha!’

“But there was no answer. Only my husband woke in alarm, and tried to calm me, and would not believe me. He said it was a delusion; they all think I am ill, but——”

She broke off, for her husband came, and we then talked of this and that, but our hearts were not in our talk.

Late in the evening I carry the wreath away with me, but the grave-digger will not let me see the sleeper. “I will attend to it,” said he kindly; “do not look at her,

ma'am, keep her in memory as she was yesterday—she looked so lovely in her blue gown."

As I stand there a man comes up—I scarcely recognize in him the Faust of yesterday evening. He looks so grief-stricken, as though he had grown twenty years older in the night. I turn to go, when his voice rings in my ears: "Ah, madame, one word !"

Of course, I follow him into the churchyard walk ; it is quite dark here, but I can distinguish the man's handsome profile. He has taken off his hat, and brushes the hair back from his forehead. Evidently he seeks suitable words of introduction.

"Madame," he at last begins hoarsely, "you knew her well, and I may tell you that I—" here he pauses—"that her desperate resolve was my fault. But," he interrupts himself, "you probably do not know that Tosca was my betrothed? Of course not," he hastily answers his own question. "She would not tell you, although I begged her to do so. She loved me, and yet she was ashamed of me before you. And I forced her to play in this unhappy place from vanity, from fear of losing her. I thought at the last moment she might return to the parsonage—then she would have been lost to me ; but it would be quite different were she to appear on the stage here. I told her to choose between me and remaining away from the stage, yesterday evening—I—I dragged her half fainting back upon the scene, when her strength left her, and when she broke down there at the roughness of the audience—no longer master of myself, I threw the ring she had given me at her feet. I do not know how it all happened ; perhaps I thought my anger would rouse her pride, and induce her to play—I cannot account to myself for what I did. I should have known long ago that she could not stand on such dangerous ground ; she was not suited to

us, to me. But I would not believe it; I loved her madly." I cannot reply, and walk silently beside him. Suddenly he stands still. "And what else is there to say?" he bursts out roughly. "She is dead—I cannot bring her to life again, were I to give my life for it—I led her away from her father's house; I drove her to death—I——"

His pale face, usually so melancholy, at this moment wore such an expression of passionate grief that I was frightened. I wish to speak a few words of comfort, and grasp his hand, but he shakes me off, and goes in great strides to the entrance of the churchyard, and I see him disappear behind the iron gate.

The sexton's wife comes slowly up to me, and takes the wreath.

"He must have been her lover," says she, "for until now he has scarcely left her since she has lain there. It is really terrible the way he speaks to her, and begs her forgiveness again and again, as though he were responsible for her death. One sees so much misery, ma'am, but I never saw anything like that before."

The next morning, quite early, they bury her. As I stop at the churchyard in my extra post-chaise an hour later, the spring sun has already withered the wreath on her grave. I stand beside the mound for a while, and then go across the quiet green churchyard to my carriage. The postilion cracks his whip, the horses start off, and after we have passed the churchyard wall he blows a song on his horn—a gay song.

How suited it seems to the dewy, sunny spring morning! In the forest the green fir-trees shine like emeralds, and the young beech leaves become almost transparent in the golden rays. Slowly the carriage rolls uphill. Once more I turn and gaze down at the little city, the two slender church spires, and the dark gables of the parson-

age. I know that a quiet woman, out of whose life all sunshine has gone, now sits at the window, and I fancy I hear the words she spoke yesterday: "Something like peace has come over me since I know she sleeps."

Under an almost bare oak-tree at the edge of the road sits a wanderer. He stares fixedly down at the city. Involuntarily I bow, for I recognize Martha's betrothed. But he turns his head, he will not see me; his lips quiver, and the hands, busy with his valise, tremble.

Slowly I drive past.

The little city grows farther and farther away; the wide world lies before me. The morning breeze fans my cheeks as I reach the summit of the mountain, and dries the last tears as though to console me. "Do not weep, for she is safe. She no longer walks on dangerous ground—she sleeps!"



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